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"The only thing that people will be talking about next year is how nothing compares to Messiah." - GAME PRO

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"It's this act (possession) of not just taking on a body, but an actual character that makes the game so unique." - CORE MAGAZINE

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MESSIAH

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For you, we closed our doors, opened up the vaults of gaming experience, and slugged it out. The result? A few bitter tears of resentment from new guy Matt, and this feature

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A GAME GEEK'S GUIDE TO
GETTING GIRLS

Since dodging the crossfire of cupid's arrows will only distract us from *Quake3*, we decided to get tactical on Valentine's Day, providing you with a completely misguided guide to games and girls. Can they ever be as one?

41
QUAKE III:
EXCLUSIVE REVIEW/STRATEGY

Continuing our tradition of sacrificing everything in order to "score," we bring you the first and best *Quake3* review, and a strategy guide to keep your name at the top of the frag list

DEPARTMENTS

What should loved ones get you for Malentine's Day? Anything digital and black will do

http://www.pcxl.com

PC ACCELERATOR · February 2000 · The perfect Malentine's Day present — Your honey and an equally hot honey-colored liquor

ON THE COVER

A **PCXL** staffer who will remain nameless says our cover model Tiffany Granath had a hard time figuring out how to hold a beer bottle correctly. Let's just hope she's better at holding "other things." Photography by Ed Fox, bodypaint/hair/make-up by Nancy Von der Launitz
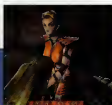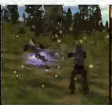
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CELEBRITIES WHOSE NAMES AND PICS WE'LL USE THIS YEAR JUST TO INCREASE OUR EVER-GROWING "BABE COUNT"

Ali Landry, Anna-Nicole Smith, Britney Spears, Cameron Diaz, Carmen Electra, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Claudia Schiffer, Demi Moore, Denise Richards, Drew Barrymore, Heidi Klum, Jennifer Aniston, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Jenny McCarthy, Jeri Ryan, Kate Moss, Katie Holmes, Keri Russel, Liv Tyler, Mila Jovavich, Natalie Portman, Naomi Campbell, Neve Campbell, Nicole Kidman, Pamela Anderson, Rebecca Gayheart, Gia (of course) plus many, many more

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

- ◆ Train for combat in Novice mode. Or go Hardcore for even more intense action.

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Be afraid of what it hides.

TO WHOMEVER IS CONCERNED

Recently, some people have complained that we here at PCXL are "immature, mean-spirited, a bad influence," and, worse yet, "too clever for our own good." Consider this a blanket apology.

→ I'm sorry we made fun of the dangerous drug crack and the "ladies" associated with said illegal substance. It was irresponsible and reprehensible. I beg for your forgiveness.

→ I'm sorry we tortured pitiful games for being pitifully sub-standard. How dare we point out the glaringly obvious. I hang my head in shame.

→ I'm sorry we've offended small minds with the use of literary tools such as sarcasm and irony. It is my fault and it makes me sad.

→ I'm sorry we've depicted women as beautiful and sexy creatures who we should worship. In retrospect, I think we loved them too much.

→ I'm sorry we do things differently than everyone else. I should have remembered from high school that being original and different just isn't acceptable.

→ I'm sorry that we find humor in just about anything. Laughing at tragedies and other people's misfortune is just plain evil. Rest assured we will roast in hell for our crimes.

→ I'm sorry you're Canadian. It's your parents' fault really. At least you're not French.

MIKE SALMON, Editor in Chief

THE TEAM

EDITOR IN CHIEF

MIKE SALMON ▶ EMAIL → mike@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → Gia ... I mean my lovely wife, Laurie
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → Suggesting that adult film star Jenna Jameson is bigger than Jesus
HIS EXCUSE → "I'm just reporting the facts here. Go on Yahoo and search for both of 'em. Now who's bigger?"
NOW PLAYING → ADE II, Quake III, Unreal Tournament, Hearts

SPOT THE FAKE AD

Find the ad in PCXL that just ain't right and email *imnofool@pcxl.com* to qualify for "fabulous" prizes.

DECEMBER FAKE AD → *The Juice*
MOCKING → Unnecessary peripherals aimed at "gamers"
JANUARY FAKE AD → *Asheron's Booty Call*
MOCKING → *Asheron's Call* and *Booty Call* – In one "Fabulous prizes this month → a date with the New Guy and a copy of Alpha Centauri – that's right, a GOOD game!

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

ROB SMITH ▶ EMAIL → rob@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → Live-in (and abnormally understanding to the point of sainthood) girlfriend, Sandy
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → "Quakehoon will be game of the year"
HIS EXCUSE → "Until the game comes out, I can't be wrong. I stand by it"
NOW PLAYING → Quake III, Unreal Tournament, FIFA 2000

MANAGING EDITOR

PHILIP MAYARD ▶ EMAIL → philip@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → As you ask, he's extremely bitter about it
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → Compared Jean-Claude Van-Damme to Shirley Maclaine
HIS EXCUSE → "Pure bitterness, plus you can't deny the similarities"
NOW PLAYING → "If you can't make fun of dead people, who can you make fun of?"
NOW PLAYING → Sin Theme Park, UT, the Gia action figure

THE NEW GUY

MATT HOLMES ▶ EMAIL → matt@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → Who isn't?
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → Blaspheming Quake III in PCXL → the "Dead Pool" article in X-tra that chronicled the hilarious celebrity deaths of 1999 and how PCXL siled them
HIS EXCUSE → "If you can't make fun of dead people, who can you make fun of?"
NOW PLAYING → Q3 Q3, Gabriel Knight III, Sin Theme Park, UT, the Gia action figure

ASSISTANT EDITOR

CHUCK OSBORN ▶ EMAIL → chuck@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → The Jan '74 issue of National Geographic
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → The "Dead Pool" article in X-tra that chronicled the hilarious celebrity deaths of 1999 and how PCXL siled them
HIS EXCUSE → "If you can't make fun of dead people, who can you make fun of?"
NOW PLAYING → Q3, Gabriel Knight III, Sin Theme Park, UT, the Gia action figure

UNPAID INTERN

SOPHIE ROMAIN ▶ EMAIL → sophie@pcxl.com
HER VALENTINE → My sweetie, Jack ... Daniels that is
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → Wishy! How am I supposed to write when I'm so busy being a slave girl?
HER EXCUSE → "I don't get paid enough to take this from you, leave me alone! Hell, I don't get paid at all"
NOW PLAYING → Slay the Dragon 2, Chessmaster 7000

INTERN/FASHION COORDINATOR

GIA DECARLO ▶ EMAIL → gia@pcxl.com
HER VALENTINE → You, her adoring fans
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → "The dirtier of my species will hide the power tool up to seven times a week, but the frequency, duration, method, and tool vary greatly"
HER EXCUSE → "It's all true. Now leave me alone, you freaks!"
NOW PLAYING → The Kenny G Christmas CD, sitting by a fire with a glass of wine

ART DIRECTOR

KYLE LEBOEUF ▶ EMAIL → kyle@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → Brenda T.
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER DONE IN PCXL → Made a graph of butts being kicked. Also provided stellar artwork for our less than glowing look at Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation
HIS EXCUSE → "I didn't write the editorial sh!t, I just made it look good"
NOW PLAYING → Homeworld, Quake III, ADE II, Recoil (yes, RECOIL)

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

ERIC SMITH ▶ EMAIL → eric@pcxl.com
HIS VALENTINE → My little Lara Croft – Anna the Dead-Indian-Digger-Upper
MOST OFFENSIVE THING EVER WRITTEN IN PCXL → The "Up the butt, Bob" box-out, where he graphically described some tragic lodgings in the anus
HIS EXCUSE → "You should have seen the original text"
NOW PLAYING → Infogrames Boaster Zone, "The best game on the planet"

12

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LESS IS MORE

ONE DISC IS BETTER THAN TWO — HONEST

Now that Ed "Put my head on a woman's body" Lee has flown off to Sweden to get his special operation, the serious task of assembling the **PCXL** CD has fallen into my lap, Matt "Newguy" Holmes. Let me tell you, it fell so hard it smashed my googlies and made me cry. But I fought through the tears to bring you new and legit demos of the latest games. Some may seem familiar — I assure you that is not the case. There is nothing but high quality gaming waiting for you here. **Note**, there are no patches — not because time ran out, but because all the games that have come out recently are *perfect* right out of the box — honest.

DEMOS YOU'LL NEVER SEE ON THE PCXL CD

EL CAPITAN PARACHUTE SAFETY DEMO ---> When Jan Davis jumped off a 3,200 foot cliff to demonstrate how safe it was, she realized it wasn't quite as safe when your parachute doesn't open.

ANYTHING WITH A MIME IN IT ---> Except for *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*, since Gabe busts one in the chops.

SEATTLE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION DEMO ---> If an entire city police department can't manage a demonstration of this size without a $10 million riot, what chance have we?

ONE FOR MY PEEPS ---> *Warcraft Adventures*, *Agents of Justice*, *Babylon 5*, *Secret of Vulcan Fury*, and all my other homies that caught a bullet before they got to grow up. Peace.

LEGEND ---->

D DEMO	**A/V** A/V
PATCHES	**MAPS** MAPS
	? RATING
TOOLS TOOLS	

DISC

PCXL

D	AGE OF WONDERS
D	URBAN CHAOS
D	INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE
D	FINAL FANTASY VIII
D	AGE OF EMPIRES II
D	NOCTURNE
D	UNREAL TOURNAMENT
D	BATTLEZONE II
D	MESSIAH
D	WARCRAFT 3 TRAILER
D	QUAKE3 DEMO

FINAL FANTASY VIII

AGE OF EMPIRES II
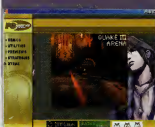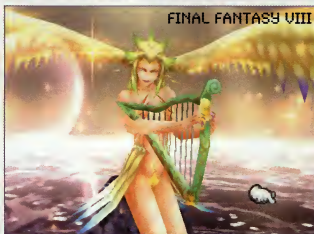
Our disc comes with a scrolling interface, and is operated by moving the mouse over the screen. The bar on the left can also be used. Click left on the mouse to select items and click left again (on the image) to return to the previous screen. If you've ever installed a game, the rest is easy.

REQUIREMENTS: WINDOWS 95/98, PENTIUM 233MHZ, 32MB RAM, DIRECTX 5.0, MOUSE, 100% SOUND BLASTER COMPATIBLE CARD

Disc problems? Visit our website at www.pcxl.com and click on the customer service link, or call 800-333-3890.

THE DISC MINI-FAQ

Q: Why does this CD have only 11 game demos and no patches or maps or anything? What the hell are you trying to pull?

A: The size of demos currently disseminated to computer gaming magazines such as ours occupies such a large volume of space, that we are forced to make executive decisions regarding the content herein. In layman's terms, "a fast one"

Q: Where are those rib-busting funny lyrics I used to claw through the magazine to get to?

A: Right on top of our wonderful ABBA albums and under the stack of hilarious *Cracked* magazines

Q: If I am accosted by a crack elite team of ninja warriors who thirst for my blood, what should I do?

A: If you bend the edges of the CD away from you with both hands, near your face mind you, when it shatters, the fragments might blind you so you don't have to see the horrible things they will do to your body

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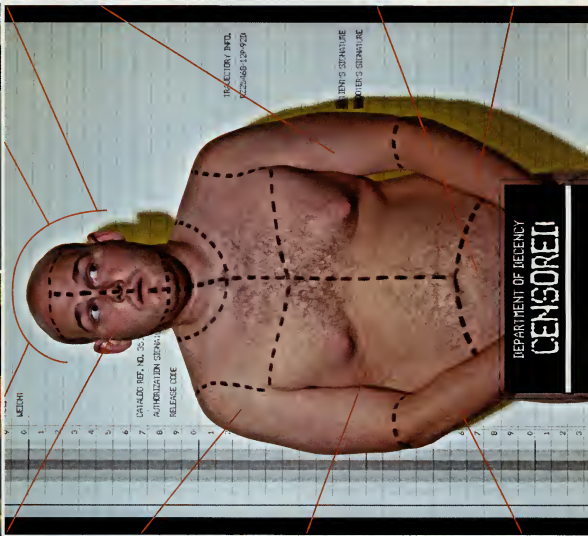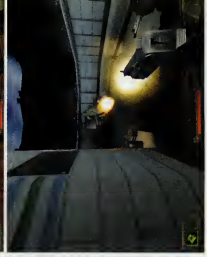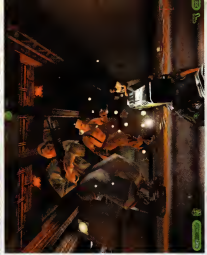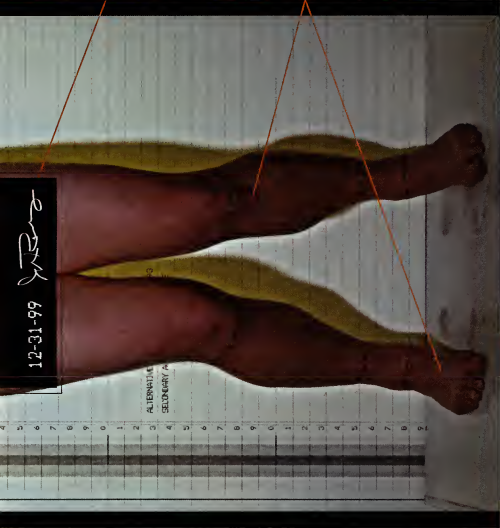
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Best games of 1999

the 2nd Annual PCXL AWARDS*

Welcome to The **PCXL** Awards. We've rented out a lavish 8'x8' auditorium, dressed up in tux and tails*, and are passing out awards to the best (and worst) the games industry had to offer during the last year of the 20th Century**. No singing, no dancing, no horrible opening production number, no half-assed witty banter — we went for the full ass with a spectacular celebration of a truly unspectacular year.

* Mmm ... tail

**Yeah, we know the 21st Century doesn't really start until 2001. Get over it.

TECHNICAL MERITS

If this were a televised awards show, these would be the awards we gave out last week in a basement in South Central that nobody really gives a crap about.

BEST GAME BOX

QUAKE III: ARENA → The sleek special edition metal box just makes a really cool game even cooler, if that's a physical, psychological, or metaphorical possibility.

BEST ADD-ON PACK

OPPOSING FORCE → Transcends the stigma of add-on packs as a "me-too level graveyard" by introducing a whole new story and new character that is almost as good as the original. Bravo!

BEST WEAPON

THE TREBUCHET (from Age of Empires II) → Mike says, "It goes shoop and takes out Chuck every time — isn't that reason enough?" Absolutely.

GAME OF THE YEAR

QUAKE III ARENA

There can be only one

The category that really counts nearly turned an editorial meeting into Fight Club II: Slappy Seconds. Let's face it — 1999 just didn't have any one game that stood heads and shoulders above the rest like Half-Life did last year. To emphasize that fact we almost gave the whole shebang to Q3Test, a near-decision that instigated a yelling match. "It's not a game, it's a test," a Mac-straddled art guy shouted. Never mind that we played it far more than any other game this year.

So how do you judge a game of the year, anyway? There's no formula for this stuff. Abstract calculations of flight models based on the migration route of the South African swallow? Does it set a new paradigm in Serbian-Nali relations? Nah ... cause we're not "those other guys." Our criterion is simple: If we were trapped on a desert island, which game would

We just wanted to make sure Rob would be wrong." — Mike Solmon about Rob's assertion last year that Daikatana would be game of the year

"But it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise ..."

we most want to take with us (assuming that the Professor is able to hook up a LAN using two coconuts and bamboo)?

In this issue you'll notice that we have given two games, Quake III Arena and Unreal Tournament, a score of 10. They were the only games released in 1999 deemed worthy of that achievement (and in fact, the only games ever to receive a "perfect" score — remember, Half-Life got an 11).

Unfortunately, there's no award for second best — sorry, UT. Quake III edges past by perfecting deathmatch to art form, and with the addition of intelligent bots, brings the experience to those poor souls lacking an internet connection (or making do with a crappy one). It's simply the very best at what it does. You can bet that Quake III will be the one game we're still playing well into next year. (See our review on p.41)

"We are the champions, my friends ... and we'll keep on fighting till the end."

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

In the unlikely event that *Quake III* cannot fulfill its duties as Game Of The Year (shyeeeah, right), *Unreal Tournament* is a capable deputy. Discarding any semblance of *Unreal*'s plot, *UT* improves on the original in almost every way, with customizable bots, improved graphics, a slew of new and interesting deathmatch modes (Assault being the highlight), and multiplayer network code that actually works. (See our review on p.62)

AGE OF EMPIRES II

Just to show that a game doesn't have to involve flying gibs to win Game Of The Year (though it helps), *AOEII* was a very serious contender before the release of *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament*. A few years ago, the idea that Microsoft could put out a game this good seemed inconceivable. Well, you live and learn. Problems with quirky AI and bad pathfinding in the first *AOE* have been straightened out, making this a surprise pick for the best RTS of 1999 (given the expectations for the ultimately disappointing *C&C: Tiberian Sun*). Plus, it has sheep and we love sheep. (We don't really love sheep, with the possible exception of our wool-loving new guy Matt. Baaaa!)

EVERQUEST

Here's the game that nearly kept us from meeting any of our deadlines last summer. Collectively, we spent a lot more time hunting gnolls in Blackburrow than we did with our girlfriends or wives, and it was impossible to juggle both ... for those of us with both. Dubbed *Evercrack* because of its addictive qualities, *Everquest* kept us online for hours at a time, building our characters. It's like one big medieval cocktail party that never stops, and we mean that in a good way, if that is possible.

SYSTEM SHOCK II

The most underrated game ever deserved a good sequel — and it certainly got one. You've got to be gutsy (or just plain dumb) to release a first-person shooter without multiplayer support these days, but Irrational Games actually improved on the original, delivering an excellent, if brutally difficult, single-player experience.

HOMEWORLD

Certainly one of the most beautiful and innovative games last year, *Homeworld* proved that having a song by Yes on your soundtrack doesn't necessarily lead to cheesiness. Now that the 3D barrier has been broken, no space RTS will be the same again. Plus, any game that allows Ed to single-handedly whup the butts of four guys from *PC Gamer* is tops in our book. (And hey, we have our own damn book, so we can do whatever we want. Take that!)

UT | **Deputy Game of the Year**

AOEII | **"The Bronze Medal"**

Everquest | **a.k.a. "Eversmack"**

WORST GAME OF THE YEAR

So much crap, so little space to slap them like the red-headed stepchildren they are ...

EXTREME BULLRIDER

In a year when Head Games (Activision in disguise) and Gonzo Games (EA incognito) were in a race to see which one could make our eyes bleed first, the competition was fierce. Could anything rival the horror of *Rival Realms*, the extreme assitude of *Links Extreme*, the splat of *Skydive!*, or the devolution of *NASCAR Revolution*? Our criteria: If we had the choice between being diagnosed with a life-threatening tumor or playing that game, which one would make us choose the tumor. *Extreme Bullrider* won hands-down — our hard drives actually sighed with relief as we uninstalled it. Unfortunately, Head Games now has an excuse to release *Extreme Bullrider: Worst Game Of The Year Edition*.

THE GOLDEN CRACK PIPE

Matt Holmes (a.k.a. "the new guy") disagreed with almost every single award we gave out. So, he decided to run off like the girly-man that he is and host his own award show, "The Golden Crack Pipes." Ever once in a while, Matt will pop in with his pick for who should've won — even if he's completely wrong.

GAME OF THE YEAR

And the Golden Crack Pipe goes to ...

SYSTEM SHOCK II

THE NEW GUY SAYS ---> Giving this award to *Quake III* is spitting in the face of every developer in the business. You're wrong, all wrong! You dog *Tomb Raider IV* for taking the same old concept and slightly prettying it up, when that is exactly what *Quake III* does. Roast in hell you freakish hypocrites!

WHY SYSTEM SHOCK II---> Because it had a great story to go through, with a huge variety of methods to achieve clear and rewarding goals. You want to shoot everything? Fine. You want to sneak about? Fine. Best of all, it was scary enough to make me crap my pants.

TECHNICAL MERITS

BEST ENEMY
THE ALIENS FROM ALIENS VS PREDATOR ---> The thought of one of these critters sneaking up on us from behind, hissing and clawing, still creeps us out. (Matt suggested some character from *Revenant*, but everyone not high on chemicals knows that aliens are the scariest creatures in pop culture, perfectly reproduced in *AvP*.)

MOST UNREALISTIC BATTLE
THE FINAL BOSSES IN KINGPIN ---> You face down the Big Boss and his Executive Crack Ho, but she's completely invulnerable to damage and you won't find that out until your intestines have been splattered against the wall several times.

BEST HARDWARE
THE MATROX MILLENNIUM G400 ---> A great 3D card that provides blazing fast 2D and 3D performance, supports 3D environment bump-mapping, and lets you hook up two monitors at one time. More than just another incremental upgrade and the drivers actually work — the only 3D card this year to actually get this right out of the box.

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BEST GRAPHICS

MECHWARRIOR III | Hi-poly and proud

As 3D hardware gets more advanced, graphics just keep getting better and better at all recognition. As 3D hardware gets pushed around, shaded, anti-aliased, and purified beyond all recognition. *MechWarrior III* is a perfect example of a game that crosses the line between fantasy and reality by looking so good that you'll truly believe giant Mechs walk the Earth. Aside from the incredible textures, shading, and lighting, you actually feel like you can control these mammoth robots.

The Contenders

FREESPACE II
Colorful gassy nebulas, super-detailed capital ships, and impressive explosions made this game a shining star in its own right.

RE-VOLT
Re-Volt has graphics that border on the photo-realistic as radio-controlled cars careen down reflective marble hallways and rainbow-hued toy stores.

SHADOW MAN
Shadow Man's dark and gritty environments amply portray the best-looking hellscape ever seen in a video game.

WORST GRAPHICS

FLY
The only game this year that had us going back to the options screen repeatedly to make sure we had set the graphics for the highest detail and turned on 3D hardware support. The screen-shots from the company looked impressive, but all we saw were some ugly splotches impersonating textures. Great flight model or not, this game is butt-ugly.

Mechwarrior III | About as "purty" as a game gets.

THE GOLDEN CRACK PIPE

RE-VOLT
THE NEW GUY SAYS--->
Morons! Can't you guys see that *Re-Volt* has vastly superior graphics over *MechWarrior III*? "Oh, look at me, I'm a giant robot in an empty wasteland. Boom, boom, boom." **WHY RE-VOLT--->** It's like playing an interactive version of *Toy Story*, but without the knowledge that one of the toys was a dope-dealer in college.

BEST SOUND

SYSTEM SHOCK II | Sssh! What was that ...

Sinister, spine-tingling, and scary all sum up the game that had the best aural effects of the year. Sound is often an afterthought in games, but in *System Shock II*, it took on a life of its own. Just thinking about hearing those screams off in the distance gives us goose bumps.

The Contenders

SHADOW MAN
Rich ambient sound and professional voice-acting made *Shadow Man* a treat for the ears. Hearing the anguished cry of a hell spawn almost made us feel bad for them.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR
Drip, drip, drip goes the goo as it drops from an Alien's maw. Jump,

System Shock II | Say what?

jump, jump out of our pants we go. *AvP* makes you depend on all your senses to survive.

NOCTURNE
With the benefit of 3D sound (or a pair of headphones worked equal-

ly well), *Nocturne's* eerie sound effects blended perfectly with the incredible graphic style. Were-wolves hummed in anticipation of appeasing their blood lust, and zombies groaned with the agony of being mostly dead, yet still walking. It enhanced the dark, moody setting perfectly. (And it sounded a lot like the **PCXL** offices on deadline night.)

WORST SOUND

MADDEN 2000
What's the deal with that MIDI porn music played in the options screen? C'mon we've heard electronic greeting cards that sounded better than that shit. And worst of all, John Madden still sounds like ... John Madden!

TECHNICAL
M E R I T S

BEST RACING GAME
RE-VOLT —> *Need For Speed: High Stakes* and *Pod Racer* offered some competition, but *Re-Volt* is too addictive to resist.

THE "PLEASE STOP MAKING" AWARD
TOMB RAIDER III —> The game engine is four years old. We still love Lara (what's not to love, eh?) but she desperately needs a new engine for *TRIV*, pretty please!

WORST IDEA
XTREME ANYTHING —> It all turns out to be *Xtreme Crap* (Which is probably why Dynamix came to their senses and cancelled *Tribes Extreme*)

BEST SPORTS GAME
HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 —> The pure game in its purest form. Not the prettiest sports game, but definitely the deepest.

BEST GAME TO DRINK BEER BY
NEED FOR SPEED: HS —> While we don't condone drinking and driving, we do recommend drinking and driving games. And no game gives you that oh-shit-I-shouldn't-be-doing-this feeling better than *NFSIII*.

BEST DESIGN

🏆 HOMEWORLD | This is what really MAKES the game

The most innovative game this year used its 3D perspective to make old 2D-style RTS games look a little tired. Balanced units, endless strategies, and cool graphics made *Homeworld* a welcome addition to an oft-duplicated genre.

The Contenders

AGE OF EMPIRES II
Well-crafted and immensely playable, *AOEII* replaces *C&C: Red Alert* as our RTS of choice.

EVERQUEST
Some might say that it' simply *Ultima Online* in 3D, but there's no denying that *Everquest* made us stop chuckling at the phrase "massively multiplayer."

QUAKE III: ARENA
Id has consistently proven that they're the tops when it comes to design, and the newest member of their franchise doesn't disappoint.

WORST DESIGN
SKYDIVE
Between *Skydive!* and *Fly!*, publishers should get the idea that putting an exclamation point in the name won't automatically make it exciting.
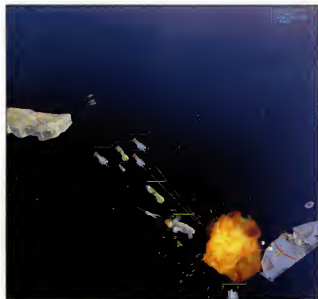
Homeworld | Who cares if crackheads hate it? We think it's tops.

THE GOLDEN CRACK PIPE

AGE OF EMPIRES II
THE NEW GUY SAYS—> It might be a sequel, but I'd much rather be playing *AOEII* over *Homeworld*. That game looks like I stuck my head in a basket of fireflies while on Robitussen. *AOEII* takes you back in time!

WHY AOEII—> What a bunch of idiots you are! *Homeworld*? Sheesh! Here's a game that you can play over and over forever. 13 different cultures, tons of technologies and units, a ruthless AI, and a random map generator make for some serious replay value. Most important is the cold, hard fact that it's the only game with a Trebuchet.

BEST DEPTH

🏆 AGE OF EMPIRES II | Am I still playing the game?

The sheer variety of countries and strategies make *AOEII*'s strategy guide the only must-have 400 page book of the year. Years from now, when others are raising hell about *Alpha Centauri*, we'll still be playing this baby.

The Contenders

SYSTEM SHOCK II
Not so much a game as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, *System Shock II* is as hard as a virgin in a brothel, but well worth the effort.

GABRIEL KNIGHT III
What starts out as a simple story about a baby being kidnapped turns into an epic tale of vampires,

AOEII | You sank my elephant!

the Holy Grail, and the bloodline of Jesus Christ.

EVERQUEST
The combination of interaction, questing, and no-risk marriage catapults *EQ* past all the other RPGs.

SHALLOWEST GAME
SOUTH PARK
While a lot of terrible games deserve this honor (*Skydive!*, *Extreme Bull Rider*, and *Frisbee Golf* come to mind), *South Park* was such a step backward that we felt it should be singled out. *SP* features wave after wave of stupid enemies coming straight at you, followed by a wave of bigger enemies, lacking any semblance of strategy. Note this turkey of a game's special recognition for Worst Use of Turkey on

BEST MULTIPLAYER

QUAKE III ARENA | Playing with yourself makes you go blind

Designed from the ground up for multiplayer mayhem, *Quake III* is a deathmatcher's wet dream come true. Despite the insipid typing of "gg" (good game) after every Internet match, playing against human opponents online will always be better than blasting bots. It says a lot about our dedication and force of will that you're reading this issue at all, because we'd much rather have said "screw the lot of you" and done nothing but play *Quake III* for the past month.

The Contenders

EVERQUEST & ASHERON'S CALL
As online-only games, it seems natural that they should be nominated in this category. Still, when it comes right down to it, wouldn't you rather be rail-gunning than rat-bashing?

AGE OF EMPIRES II
It's hard to beat playing *AOEII* on a LAN (if only to totally piss opponents off by stealing their sheep).

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
With so many types of game modes from which to choose (straight deathmatch, CTF, Assault) and creative level design, *UT* gives gamers more options than any shooter on the market.

MOST DISAPPOINTING

C&C II: TIBERIAN SUN
Ever since the release of *Red Alert*, we've been hungering for the latest *C&C*. Imagine our disappointment when *Tiberian Sun* turned out to be a slow, buggy pile of crappola with uneven units and lackluster gameplay.

Asheron's Call | Hello? Best Multiplayer of the Year calling ...

THE GOLDEN CRACK PIPE

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
THE NEW GUY SAYS: *Quake III* has Assault and Domination mode, built-in mutators, a comprehensive user interface, 13 different weapons, and huge outdoor levels. Oh wait, *Quake III* doesn't have any of that. *Unreal Tournament* does. You can all blow me.

WHY UT? It's got everything *Quake III* has and more. And it doesn't suck ass like *Quake III*. Plus I win at it.

BEST SINGLE-PLAYER

SYSTEM SHOCK II | If you have to be alone ...

The only game released this year that came close to capturing the excellence of *Half-Life*'s single-player gameplay, *System Shock II* has it all: A great story, fantastic graphics, and a genuinely disturbing concept to boot. Who can forget the walls and floors peeling away into darkness when Shodan confronts you on the multi-monitor walls of doom? Not us.

The Contenders

BALDUR'S GATE
Normally, if you're talking about D&D and not Double D's, we get bored to tears. But BioWare reinvented the franchise with this deep, involving RPG set in The Forgotten Realms.

System Shock II | 'Nuff said.

SWAT III
As good as *Rogue Spear* was, it still couldn't match the single-player experience provided by *SWAT III*. Better graphics and inventive missions makes this the best SWAT game yet. (Not saying much, since they've all sucked.)

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON
One of the biggest surprises of the year, *Rollercoaster Tycoon* was both a massive critical and financial success — even though it didn't let you ride your creations in first-person. If, and more likely when, designer Chris Sawyer announces a *Rollercoaster Tycoon II*, we'll be eagerly waiting .

WORST SINGLE-PLAYER

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D
There is no fun in *POP3D* ... Oh, the frustration! From the inept control and asinine combat system to the murky graphics, it's amazing this one got past Q&A. Unless, of course, there wasn't any Q&A. Hmm ...

TECHNICAL MERITS

BEST GAME TO INSPIRE DRINKING
FLY! → No matter how much alcohol you may have stockpiled, it won't be nearly enough.

BABE OF THE YEAR
MYRNA BLANKENSTEIN-WHATEVERNAMEIS → We forgot her name, but we'll never forget her.

BEST USE OF SILICON TO REPRESENT SILICON
RYNN (FROM DRAKAN) → Modelers spent more time on her breasts and butt than her face and personality, but you don't see us complaining.

BEST GAMING MOMENTS
ALIENS VS PREDATOR → The first time you see an Alien drop down in front of you will make you pee in someone else's pants. OPPOSING FORCE → Having the Plasma Gun attach itself to your arm, then trying to get another, only for it to attack you. SLAVE ZERO → Picking up people, throwing them against a building, and watching them go splat.
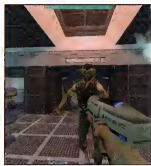
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TECHNICAL
MERITS

PCXL ALL-STARS

BEST ACTOR
THE STRANGER IN NOCTURNE —> While FMV actors really sucked this year (yes, we're talkin' to you, James Earl Jones), this guy was simple, uncomplicated, totally convincing, and uniques.

BEST ACTRESS
GRACE NAKIMURA (CHARITY JAMES) in *Gabriel Knight III* —> Hello? A voice actress who can give a subtle performance and doesn't vamp her way through each line of dialogue?

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR
OTIS THE SECURITY GUARD in *Opposing Force* —> Big, loveable oafs are just so loveable. Nobody portrays the emotional range between big and oafish better than Otis.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS
THE ASSISTANT CRACK-WHORE from *Kingpin* —> When she said "Yo, mother" —ker, you talk to your mama with that?" she touched our souls and made us cry. Look for her to co-star with Glenn Close as a young crack-whore dying from cancer in "The Stepcrackwhore."

T he days of a single person slaving away in their bedroom, churning out a game that will set the world on fire are long gone. These days, development is handled by teams — legions of artists, designers, programmers, who collectively create a vision, much the way movies are made. But there are still those in the industry who have so impressed us with their creativity and brilliance that we must shower them with individual praise.

If PCXL could create a gaming dream team, these are the folks we would hire to "get the job done." And just in case it didn't work out, we would still leverage all the hype they'd get us into renting out an expensive office building in downtown Dallas.

The Original *Age of Empires*

Lead Designer
BRUCE SHELLY
The man behind *Age Of Empires II* has proven time and again that he is one of the best in the business when it comes to RTS and god games. Bruce co-designed *Civilization* and *Railroad Tycoon* with some guy named Sid Meier before joining Microsoft and creating the original *Age Of Empires*. But it's the superior sequel that elevates him to a class all his own.

3D Rendering Engine Programmer
JOHN CARMACK
Approaching the status of industry legend (we reserve those embellishments for old-school types who get their name above the game title on box covers) for being a co-owner of Id, and one of the creators of the ground-breaking *Doom*, John Carmack fathered the engines of all three *Quake* games. You've seen his work in every game using the *Quake* engine, including *Half-Life* and *Daikotano*.

Homeworld | Salvage this!

Game Conceptualist
ALEX GARDEN
Along with Luke Moloney, Alex Garden founded Vancouver-based Relic Entertainment in 1997. And, boy, are we glad they did. As the CEO of Relic, he oversaw the release of its first game, *Homeworld*, to critical success in 1999. Plus he's bought us lots of drinks and brings cute girls to industry parties. As our pick for Best Design, it's only fitting that we single out *Homeworld*'s daddy.

Lead Writer
JANE JENSEN
One nameless PCXL editor (who has yet to play a *Gabriel Knight* adventure and calls them "girl games") conceded that this award should go to Jane Jensen because "Tim Schaeffer didn't do a game this year." The truth is, anytime Jane Jensen writes a game, there is reason for celebration. She's a master storyteller whose work on Sierra's *Gabriel Knight* trilogy has pushed it beyond the classification of mere "adventure game" into interactive literature. And the aforementioned editor is nothing more than an ignorant slut.

Texture Artist
KENNETH SCOTT
Having been hired away from the *Daikotano* team by the lure of *Quake III Arena* (and many of his incredible textures are still a fundamental part of *Daikotano*'s look), Kenneth Scott's artistic talent is flourishing at Id. The requirement to keep gameplay super-fast for *Q3A* reduced the amount of detail available in some areas, but there are even veins pulsing in the leg of the Uriel model (if you make the mistake of looking close enough). The best is still to come in the single-player game that will be Id's next creation.

Level Design
TAMMY DARGAN
As designer, writer, and director of Sierra's *SWAT III*, Tammy Dargan could be on this list in any one of those categories. Her details in the real world locations, like the suburban home with stereo system, TV, magazines (not PCXL we're distraught to note), and ripped couch added greatly to the experience and nabbed her this award.

Quake | Reaper Bots in action.

AI
STEVE POLGE
Naturally, the creator of the original *Quake* reaper bots would be hired up in a second by any developer with a shred of common sense ... and sure enough Epic brought him on board. Steve Polge's AI in *Unreal Tournament* is phenomenal, with realistic bots that weave and move like a seasoned pro. They still can't beat the PCXL staff, though — we've got some crazy kung-fu mojo.

Art Design
REES IVATTS
The eerily beautiful art design in *Shadow Man* left us wondering "Who did that?" Well, it turned out to be Acclaim Studios' Teesside lead artist and world builder Rees Ivatts, who conjured up some incongruous images as an old steam engine transporting you to an insane asylum in hell. We're not sure what he was smoking, but we'd sure like some.
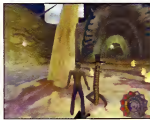
Shadowman | Eye crack.

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LAST YEAR'S PREDICTIONS

How good were we at predicting the year's hits? Better than we were at picking their release dates ...

Back in the February issue last year, we viewed the PCXL crystal ball, looking for inspiration for those games in 1999 that would re-write the rules, close down the magazine due to their addictive qualities, and, well, kick ass. Did we get it right?

The Shooters:

Duke Nukem Forever was our number one pick. We hereby re-enter its nomination in the same category for 2000!

Daikatana was number two, and it's still not released at press time.

Aliens vs Predator came in at number three. A fine game, so score one for us.

The Psychic Friend said: Cautiously opting for "the one with the aliens," the power of the Network is justified, as it's the only one of the three games to actually ship.

More Than Just Shooters:

What do the following gold, silver, and bronze medallists from our story have in common? *Mox Poyne, Hired Guns, X-COM: Alliance ...*

Correct — none of them shipped in 1999.

The Magic 8-Ball gave no indication that none of these games (nor *Prey* and *Novy SEALs*, listed as other contenders) would see the light of day. Don't trust the Magic 8-Ball.

Teamplay Games

This is where we knew what we were talking about. *Quake III Arena* in gold position. Check. *Unreal Tournament* in Silver. Check. *Team Fortress* in Bronze. DOH! Ink it in with a Sharpie for the hot favorite winner in the 2000 awards, though.

Realtime Strategy

Was it our mistake or were we simply let down? *C&C: Tiberian Sun* had us prophesying its rise to mega-status, only to be the biggest letdown of '99. Similarly the potential of *TA: Kingdoms* as a *War-Croft 2* addendum fired a blank. It was our bronze-place recommendation *AOEII* that got the plaudits.

Alternative Realtime Strategy

Homeworld was a shoe-in for this and didn't even remotely disappoint, but *Shogun* and *Giants*, in silver and bronze positions respectively, failed to make it out the door before the corks started popping for the new millennium.

Celebrity psychic Jean Dixon was no bloody use at all in the gaming predictions, and her suggestion that Andre the Giant would take the WWF crown was just plain nonsense.

RPG/Action

We were right on the money with this one. With the exception of gold medal recipient *Diablo 2* slipping into next year both *Wheel of Time* and *Everquest* came through. In retrospect the incredible addictive qualities of *Everquest* should have elevated it to the silver position. We can be well satisfied with a prediction well done.

Adventure

We called *Drokon* as the winner, and I guess we were right, but that's mainly due to the lackluster showing of other contenders. Silver-medal winner *Outcost* got a little too big for its French (or Belgian) boots and failed to inspire, and *Messiah* has yet to hit stores. And we knew that *Tomb Roider IV* and *Indiana Jones* would be virtually the same game, and guess what? They are.

Mech Games

Right on the money with this one, too, as our call of *MechWorrior 3* on top, second placed *Slove Zero* deserving its position, as does *Storseige* in bronze. *Heavy Geor 2* turned out to be better than expected, and perhaps should have edged *Storsiege*, but hey, we were just about right.

Unfortunately, Billy the Prognosticating Pullet named *Starsiege* the winner (he actually pooped on the box, but we took that as a prognostication) and was recently slaughtered, served with roast potatoes, carrots, and thick gravy for a wonderful holiday dinner.

This is an actual photograph of our elaborate judging system for the PCXL Awards. The skinny guy in lipstick on the floor is new guy Matt Holmes. We finally had enough of his constant whining and decided to beat down the newbie. Because we can.

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GETTING GIRLS

SMOOTH TALKIN,'
MARTINI SIPPIN'
PCXL LOVE MASTERS
SHARE VALENTINE'S
SECRETS ON HOW TO
PLAY GIRLS AND
MEET GAMES ... ERR

By
CHRIS HUDAK
and JOHN
FOSTER

OKAY PALM-SHAVERS, LISTEN UP! REACTION TIME IS A FACTOR. SAY THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES INTO YOUR MIND WHEN WE SAY "FLYING FAT BABY WITH A BOW AND ARROW." NO — NOT *MESSIAH*! DAMMIT, YOUR ANSWER IS THE REASON WE'RE WRITING THIS ARTICLE. WHEN YOU SEE THAT PINT-SIZED CHUBBY CHERUB WHIZZING AROUND PLINKING PEOPLE, IT MEANS VALENTINE'S DAY IS BREATHING DOWN YOUR NECK ... AND BABY, WITH THIS MUCH LOVE MAGIC IN THE AIR, EVEN YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET A DATE.

AS A SERVICE TO YOU, OUR READER AND — DARE WE SAY IT — OUR FRIEND, **PCXL** HAS SOUGHT AN ANSWER TO THE MYSTERY THAT PLAGUES SO MANY GAMERS, "HOW DO I GET A GIRL?" WE'VE SEARCHED HIGH AND LOW, DISCUSSED THIS CONUNDRUM OVER BEER, SUBJECTED OURSELVES TO COUNTLESS SECONDS OF DAYTIME TALK SHOWS, DRANK MORE BEER, PICKED UP (AND HASTILY PUT DOWN) MANY *WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS*-TYPE BOOKS, SLURPED DOWN MORE BREW ... AND, AMAZINGLY, REACHED AN ANSWER.

COMMUNICATION

To get chicks, a guy needs to communicate — often by talking. Realizing this Herculean task would prove impossible for almost any gamer worth his gaming spurs, and tougher for those even more worthless, we beat our heads against this barrier for days (and sucked down more beer) until a glimmer of hope laser-burned its way through the hangover.

What if we simply played to our strengths? What if we're so good at gaming, it somehow triggers an "I want the alpha male" response in females? Heavy stuff. Before we could commit our theory to print, we knew it needed rigorous testing, experimentation, quantifiable results. Unfortunately, we have no scientific credibility whatsoever. But we've never let a lack of credibility stop us before.

TERMINOLOGY

Here's a quick primer of terminology used in our experiments ...

Chick = Girl = Babe = Woman = Lady = Female = The ones with the bumps who constantly perplex us

Game Guy = You = Horny = Geek-like = Perplexed = Everyone needs a little help sometimes

Game = Game

Theory = An unproven idea that's more than likely wrong

Hypothesis = An unproven idea that's more than likely wrong. Also, the side of a right-angled triangle opposite the right angle.

Postulate = Something you assume from the outset to be true, unproven and wrong pretty much by definition

PCXL = Horny = Geek-like = Perplexed = Everyone needs a little help — and we're here to give it

EXPERIMENT ONE:
THE "INTERACTIVE ROMANCE"

THE LEGEND OF LOTUS SPRING

SUMMARY ⟶ In an ongoing effort to bring males and females together via the arena of computer gaming, a number of new companies are creating "gender-friendly™" titles. DreamCatcher Interactive (http://www.dreamcatchergames.com) has developed an interactive romantic adventure based on a true story. *The Legend of Lotus Spring* (set to release February 2000) has players of most major sexes participating in the story of a young emperor and the woman that he is forbidden to love. Described as a "whimsical, non-violent game," *TLLS* takes you to the Far East over 100 years ago, touching on cultural, as well as romantic and adventure elements. As a date-locating technique, the *TLLS* experiment was an abject failure, as evidenced by this Session Excerpt from a co-ed focus group:

SUBJECT ONE (female) ⟶ They should've gotten Fabio to be in this thing!
SUBJECT TWO (female) ⟶ I'd like to help with the "motion capture" for that!
SUBJECT ONE (female) ⟶ It's so whimsical and non-violent!
SUBJECT THREE (female) ⟶ Awwwww, look at that! There's a "virtual serenade."
SUBJECT FOUR (male) ⟶ Sweet Jesus, please let me die.

PLUSES ⟶ Subjects 1-3 enjoyed whimsical, non-violent gameplay; Subject 4 also experienced Culture and Sensitivity-Broadening elements, as per his previous plea bargain with the City and County of San Francisco, California. (His original offense involved animal shelter felines and "Black Cat" brand firecrackers, but we shan't elaborate on that story.)

MINUSES ⟶ Despite a sincere effort on Subject Four's part to share the cultural and romantic elements of the game, considerable friction erupted. Subjects 1-3 suggested a "Fore-Player HunkMatch" mode while Subject Four insisted the experience remain a "Single-Player Shooter." Alas, Subject Four did not survive the triple-strength Silent Treatment that ensued.

OVERALL SUCCESS RATING (OUT OF FIVE) ⟶ Minus One. Not only did the male subject fail to score, but he was repeatedly and needlessly reminded of his utter lack of resemblance to Fabio.

What the hell? Not only is this guy drinking some sissy-looking tea, he's actually making the crap for his woman himself!

EXPERIMENT TWO:
PLAYING HOUSE

Rrow! Should I have my sim couple kiss, tickle, or dance? Please excuse our obsession with lesbians. We knew you wouldn't mind.

THE SIMS

Frankly, everyone believes that *The Sims*, from software-as-living-toy masters Maxis, is going to be an absolutely cool game. If you didn't read last month's exposé (crawl out from under your rock), it's the "game of life" made real. You develop characters, Sims as they're called, and guide, coddle, force, etc. them through various phases in life, searching for financial and marital success. You can end up a lazy, jobless, criminal (much like the PCXL editorial staff) or you can develop a thriving career, gain the respect of your peers and co-workers, and generally lead the sort of enviable life we'll never quite achieve.

Lightbulb flashin' over your noggin yet? That's right — this should be perfect for connecting with chicks! We had the same thought ... not surprisingly, we once again demonstrated our total lack of experience and knowledge of the female thought process.

We were deep into the experiment when we realized that playing *The Sims* with a cute lass is like eating the broccoli and skipping dessert. How so? *The Sims* is just so *real* when you play it with a chick. They actually try to *do well* with their characters and they want you to succeed too. By the time you're done, you're married, employed, saddled with children ... and you haven't even gotten a kiss off the girl (in real life).

PLUSES ⟶ If you're really hard up, *The Sims* is sort of like practice for relating to real flesh and blood females.

MINUSES ⟶ *The Sims* presents all the work with none of the perks. Perhaps the most telling test-result was this ... babes don't get weak-kneed around men who play house!

OVERALL SUCCESS RATING (OUT OF FIVE) ⟶ 2.5 dollies — While the game initially got the attention of the female subjects and painted the male subject in a sensitive light, it eventually rendered the male subject more hard up than ever in "real life."

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**THE RUSSIAN BEAR
IS STIRRING.**

**EASTERN EUROPE
JUST WENT CODE RED.**

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EXPERIMENT THREE:
GIRLS THINK THEY CAN DRIVE

NASCAR LEGENDS & TEST DRIVE 6

Why did man invent the wheel? So he could invent cars. Why did he invent cars? So he could impress chicks, of course. The attempt to translate the theory that "chicks are impressed by car-savvy guys" into "chicks are impressed by car-GAME-savvy guys" began with Test Drive 6 from Infogrames — and an utter failure to "get her motor running." The following audio was recorded during a race through Rome:

GUY ---> Hey! Watch the curve coming up!

CHICK ---> Is there a map? I don't think this is the best route, we should stop and ask for directions. Isn't Father of the Bride on Channel 4 tonight?

CAR ---> [CRASHES]

The session was immediately scrubbed and re-started the next day using Nascar Legends. In

addition to bitchin' graphics, the incredibly realistic races in Nascar Legends are on tracks — eliminating the whole map thing. Our male test subject was able to expound on the muscular virtues of a 1970 Plymouth and get veeeeery groovy in his lingo.

GUY ---> This is so groovy.

CHICK ---> Did you just say the word "groovy"?

As the race intensified, Nascar Legends and the general graaviness seemed to be having the desired effect.

CHICK ---> Mmmmm, wish I could drive this with a joystick ...

Unfortunately, this test case proved inconclusive, because the friggin' puss — ahem — guy, made the fatal mistake of paying too much attention to the game and ignoring the girl. He allowed a full 37 seconds to elapse before responding to the joystick statement, sending several possible messages to the test chick:

A) He was not interested in any way whatsoever in helping her get her hands on a joystick.

B) He cared more about the game than he did about her.

C) He is a total lame-ass and is wasting oxygen that a real man could use to deliver a clever jaystick retort.

Despite the excellence of Nascar Legends, this experiment resulted in the death-knell response:

CHICK ---> Isn't Father of the Bride on Channel 4 tonight?

Select your driving game carefully. Some have "hotseat" mode, if ya know what I mean.

OVERALL SUCCESS RATING (OUT OF FIVE) ---> Five joysticks for the game, three joysticks for the experience of actually playing this with a female, and an obvious and complete lack of a joystick on the part of the male test subject.

EXPERIMENT FOUR:
CHANGING TACK

Now here's a Valentine present you and your chick can appreciate. Outfits like this available at playboystore.com.

NOCTURNE

When G.O.D. opened the Spook-House doors and unleashed their deliciously ghastly Nocturne, little did they imagine the power they were placing in the hands of the would-be non-virginal male. A combination of "X-Files" chic and

classic survival harror action, Nocturne will give you the tools to awaken your "little zombie" from the dead, but you can't expect G.O.D. to do all the work. Take a cue from the game's incredible atmosphere and transform your grotty little hovel into an environment suitable for jitters-induced

romance. Lower the lighting ... candles should be a nice touch. Make sure your friend/roommate/mam (ah, you sad little boy) won't pop in and burst your love-bubble at the climactic moment. Steal some grave stones and casually lay them about:

GIRL ---> Are those real grave stones?

YOU ---> Oh, these? They sure are.

GIRL ---> You're so cool, after we play a little bit of Nocturne, let's do some ... rubbings.

Don't talk during the game play if you can help it. Let the silence and tension build so that when a shambling horror suddenly lunges at her onscreen persona, she'll shriek. The effect is totally ruined, however, if you're the one who lets loose an effeminate shriek.

PLUSES ---> With proper set-up and execution, a "Nocturne Date" will deliver more sizzle than a dozen oysters. Even if you don't score, a night of blasting werewolves and zombies is a night well spent.

MINUSES ---> There's a definite gross-out factor at work here. When ghouls overwhelm your date and feast on her twitching on-screen corpse, she may be more inclined to vomit than make out with you. On the other hand, you can turn this negative to your advantage by slapping a hand over the offending image and intoning in your best movie hero voice, "This isn't something you want to see."

OVERALL SUCCESS RATING (OUT OF FIVE) ---> Four Severed Zombie arms. Good for you!

EXPERIMENT FIVE:
SAVE ME HERO!

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT

Admittedly an unlikely candidate for Date Movie of the Year, *The Blair Witch Project* — the over-hyped, no-budget, shake-cam, low-grade-video epitaph for three missing-and-presumed-screwed filmmakers — yielded the highest results in terms of female subjects exposed versus female subjects, ah, exposed. Throughout the course of the film, the three actors lose their bearings, hurl profanities at each other, and eventually

meet an enigmatic but doubtless unpleasant end.

Of course, the game version of this, utilizing the *Nocturne* engine, is in the works and will be published by G.O.D. A clingy female, the DVD, followed by the game ... what kind of loser would you have to be screw up this opportunity for a terror-induced tryst? Now where the f—k is the map?

Okay, so it was pretty cool, but *The Blair Witch Project* is officially the most parodied movie in history.

PLUSES ---> The overwhelming majority of female subjects tested responded positively, often sporadically clinging to the males next to them during, and in most cases after, the film. At least two left the theater with the stated intention of staying with the males that evening. Of course, at least a quarter of the male subjects *also* clutched the males next to them at least once during the film. There are, ah, *other* magazines that will deal with those test results.

MINUSES ---> A very, very slim but noteworthy percentage (about 8%) of otherwise-sensitive female subjects found the film's terror element utterly ineffective — thereby degrading the relative status of the participating males (who thought the film was scary) to that of instant, shriveled Weenie. "This is so not cool, Josh!"

OVERALL SUCCESS RATING (OUT OF FIVE) ---> Five wood-stick-figure-thingies. Heh, heh, heh — we said "wood."

WHAT WE LEARNED

Of course, much of our experimentation assumed the herculean task of getting the girl into your "love nest" in the first place. If you can manage that, then it's best to keep your passion for gaming a secret (until you've bagged her).

Going the route of using horror to terrify a "victim" to your arms is more fraught with problems (not to mention issues of legality). So get them in to your life in whatever way you can, then you can use the tips and game styles we've investigated to ensure that you can still spend time at your PC *and* keep the girlfriend happy (a tough mix — trust us).

What could possibly be better than a lovely co-operative *Diablo* adventure, a *Worms: Armoogeddon* face-off, or living out your virtual lives together in *Everquest* or *Asheron's Coll*?

Remember though, that the real fun and frolics needs to be done in the real world, online. There are probably laws against that kind of thing. ▶

EXPERIMENT SIX:
LET'S GET LITERARY

Stephen King's "F13" key — scary reading.

SALEM'S LOT

This technique was developed outside our offices but captured on videotape. It's so diabolical, so shameless, that we hesitate to even report it. But we will anyway.

The Diabolical Test Subject (DTS for short) had candles lit, Courvoissier at the ready, and was seated with a girl (GIRL for short) on a couch. Further still, he was, brace yourselves, talking to her. In the midst of our shock we realized that he was reading.

It took us two minutes to determine what tome of romantic lore he was reciting ... it was *Salem's Lot*, by Stephen King.

You may be saying "So what? I'm a gamer, not a librarian." Or perhaps you've seen the 1970s made-for-TV movie "Salem's Lot" starring Starsky (or was it Hutch?) Well, pay attention Love Master ... by borrowing someone else's words you'll *seem* smart. By displaying no fear (even during the graveyard scene with little Danny Glick) you'll *seem* more manly. But above all else, by reading, you will appear to be communicating.

At press time we hadn't managed to work out whether Blue Byte's new Stephen King-based release *F13* will induce the same terror effect as *Salem's Lot*. It does feature a new story from the currently rehabilitating horror-meister and desktop themes and screensavers, etc. for fanboys. Fan-girls are fewer, but never turn to their touchy-feely drivel as a substitute.

TIFFANYSDOMAIN.COM

Do you know why we love Tiffany so much? (If you've seen her pictures here and you don't know, you've got bigger problems than we thought). We love her because she's on *Playboy*'s new video "Wildwebgirls.com"

And we love her because she's on the Playboy Channel's "Night Calls." She also has her very own website that we've been spending an inordinate amount of time "researching" for this feature ... tiffanysdomain.com.

If, after reading this little bit of prose, you still remain chickless, you can see a whole lot more of Tiffany and a wagon-load of other babes who have problems staying dressed) on "Wildwebgirls.com" ... or check out www.playboy.com for all the steamy details.

Thanks Tiffany!

The Fate of the Universe Lies in the Hands of

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Kurt Hectic, once a mild-mannered janitor, now savior of the universe is back in MDK2.

This time Kurt is joined by the dangerously brilliant Dr. Fluke Hawkins and the 6-legged gun-toting robotic dog Max. These three unlikely heroes are ready to out-sneak, out-blast and out-think their enemies.

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- Play as 3 heroes, each offering a different gameplay experience:

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- Save the world with unorthodox munitions like the Black Hole Grenade and the Atomic Toaster.

- Humorous storyline unfolds with each level all the way to the spectacular grand finale.

- Developed by Bioware Corp., creators of the award-winning game Baldur's Gate.™

100

Sound goods.

If you're searching for the best possible 3D audio experience, you can spend a lot of time listening to the claims of imitators. Or you can get the ultimate experience with A3D on a Vortex card from Aureal, the folks who invented 3D audio for the PC.

The Vortex SQ1500 delivers award-winning A3D on two or four speaker systems, or on headphones, and is the ideal choice for gamers on a budget.

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Wavetracing, also on two our four speaker systems, and is the ultimate PC audio experience.

Aureal has always provided the best 3D audio technology for the industry, and now we can offer you our own sound cards, built from the ground-up by Aureal engineers. Get the goods that sound good...sound cards from Aureal.

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AUREAL
HEAR THE FUTURE

(Acutal Screenshot)

QUAKE III ARENA

Quake III Arena is finished. I have finished *Quake III Arena*. But I'm far, far, far from finished with the intense shooting match. Like no other game before it (including *Quake* and *Quake II*), *Q3A* (as it shall henceforth be known) is the first release of an institution — the last word in deathmatching. A gaming concept that really kicked off with *Daam* and matured over the past five years in Id's capable hands, has culminated here with the zenith of action gaming.

Q3A is a pure adrenaline-fueled trinity of graphics rendering prowess, network playability, and physical "feel." When the map editor and source code are released (which will more than likely be by the time you read this), the expandability will open up a whole new arena of cool user mods, just as was the case with the first two classics in the now infamous *Quake* series.

That's the future. What about the here and now? Here, now, *Q3A* is a near-perfect realization of Id's concept for a multiplayer-focused deathmatch action thrill-fest. It's blood, guts, and glory, all packaged in one of the most incredible 3D engines you'll ever see. But you knew that already. Here's how the unspecified details of model types, map, skin types and, vitally, the AI Bots, finally turned out ... the world exclusive review of *Quake III Arena*.

What Made The Cut?

ACCELE-RATED

GL Setup does a great job of ensuring that whatever video card you have, the correct drivers are installed. Ideally, you want a TNT2 Ultra to enjoy the 32-bit graphics. Voodoo3 owners are going to get good performance, but without the juicy graphical effects. Also, the drivers for Nvidia's GeForce card are, at press time, still sorely lacking, which caused occasional graphic pauses (but great quality) on a machine we used.

F or those who've not spent enough time reading this fine vessel of gaming information, *Q3A* is the latest installment of the deathmatching genre. There's no story to speak of, though the manual does mention some futuristic Arena Eternal setup whereby an alien race amused themselves with gladiator-like combat. *Q3A*'s about you against your buddies or co-workers on an office LAN, random strangers over the 'Net, or computer-controlled Bots (or even with them in Team DM and CTF).

Let's start with that single-player experience. Five skill levels let you tailor the game for your own ability level from "I Can Win" (the "I" being my mom, I reckon, given the "special" abilities of the characters), where Bots have 70% health and do 70% normal damage. Anyone who's played first-person shooters to any degree will have to go straight to the third level, "Hurt Me Plenty," (90% health, 90% damage) for a challenge. For a real workout, the "Hardcore" setting (100% all round — an even playing field) will take genuine talent to complete the game, and the ludicrous slaughter of the "Nightmare" setting is for bragging rights only.

But the difficulty level isn't just about these basic stats — the higher the setting, the faster the Bots acquire targets, the more accurate their shots, and the faster and more effectively they navigate the levels.

Level design is also a vital component in the difficulty equation, with the earliest ones being simple rooms connected by wide corridors. As you progress the designs become more challenging. The new accelerator pads that fling you across the map and bounce pads that catapult you into the air ensure that you develop great spatial awareness. They also add a tremendous amount of speed — there's really no pausing for breath in a Hardcore deathmatch.

In total there are 26 levels (plus four specifically designed for Capture-The-Flag) divided into six tiers of four levels each, with an introduction level and a final tourney map. Of the four levels in each tier, three feature a set assortment

A typical scenario you may often run into: Enemy. Close. Rocket Launcher. Run. Fast.

of the game's 32 characters, whom you have to best in a race to the frag limit. The fourth map is the "boss" level — a one-on-one duel to the death.

This setup is a great teaching aid for playing the game against humans. The Bots often attempt to control a level, with characters favoring certain power-ups and weapon choices. Just like playing against humans, learn the level to mess with their patterns and prevent them running their preferred routes. There's still replayability in the single-player since as the Bots increase in difficulty, their tactics adjust, too, and they're quicker to get to their prime positions, acquire their favored weapons, and be more accurate when trying to stop you from doing the same.

Turn on "smart icons" to speed up gameplay.

LEVEL ···▷ DM2 House of Pain

TACTICS ···▷ Control the Haste power up and the red armor. With the Haste, arm yourself with the plasma gun and hunt Phobos down. The yellow armor is also available on this level. If Phobos grabs the Haste (you'll hear the announcer call it out) run and hide.

LEVEL ···▷ DM4 The Place of Many Deaths

TACTICS ···▷ Always get the Red Armor (it's right behind you at the spawning point). The rocket launcher is up the stairs. Between that and the plasma gun, control the area between the red armor and the quad power up.

PC Gamer was talking Q3 trash, so we played a little CTF. Final score: PCXL 8, PC Gamer 1. PC ACCELERATOR ◯ January 2000 www.pcxl.com

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Bots Have Feelings Too

A significant score of Q3A's Bots over the character-less mannequins of Unreal Tournament is the personality with which each of the 32 different characters is imbued. Apart from looking absolutely incredible, painted with the best-looking skins in the history of game characters, the Bots have their own styles and preferences and are introduced at the beginning of each tier in a mini-cinematic.

The 21 models (some are used more than once, but painted with very different skins) have varying degrees of animation that relate to their personality types. The cyber-rollerblade wearing Slash character does a fantastic leap, legs akimbo, while the cyber-boarding

Anarki (the tier three boss) spins in the air with his own signature move and a few have exotic death animations for extra style points.

Aside from their weapon choices and specializations (Tankjr is a lumbering rocket whore, Tier 2 boss Hunter a lightning gun fiend and the final boss, Xaero, is a deadeye with the railgun) the characters all have hundreds of lines of comment to spew. Fortunately it's all text-based (no infuriating audio chatter around here) and also amazingly context-sensitive, and each Bot can pull from a huge library of comments.

The Bot AI certainly isn't perfect, however. While the characters will seek out items that have a set position on the level such as the power-ups (Haste, Regeneration

(ups your health to 200), Quad damage, Invisibility, BattleSuit, MegaHealth, and Flight (only available on one tier six space map), and weapons, they won't move to pick up any dropped by gibbed opponents. Their decision on which opponent to attack seems to be made on the level of threat — so unlike human players, they won't get tunnel vision and hunt

down one target they've got a bead on if anyone else intervenes as a greater threat.

Their smack-talking ways can also let you score a few cheap kills, as they will pause just as humans do when "typing" a message to you. They will rocket-jump on higher difficulty levels to reach prominent power ups such as the red armor, however.

FUTURE HALL OF FAMER #1

DM12: THE DREDWERKZ

As the first opportunity to get your mitts on the BFG10K, this level has a large, open, central location with a pool. Dive in the pool, swim up the first tunnel to air, and a room housing the BFG. The exit opens high above the pool — sitting there and firing is fine, but the distance makes it difficult to guarantee the destruction the BFG should cause. So leap down to the ledge below and grab the rocket launcher as a backup, then get busy (for the ultimate rampage, try to time your drop down right when the Quad power appears). Remember that BFG ammo is chronically limited. Resist the temptation to go nuts and fire in controlled bursts (though going nuts the first time you get it is acceptable).

A camping spot high on the opposite side of the pool to the BFG room exit is also a good railgun perch — but remember to travel the outer hallways and use the accelerator pad to grab the red armor. Move from armor to BFG to completely dominate the level.

Control this room, as well as the route to the Quad/Haste room.

LEVEL ···▶ DM6 The Camping Grounds

TACTICS ···▶ This railgun perch is fairly easy to defend – listen out for anyone using the bounce pad that gets you to the level. When running over the platform opposite, always fire a rocket as you come into the open, in case anyone's sitting there.

LEVEL ···▶ DM8 Brimstone Abbey

TACTICS ···▶ The center room has the power ups, and just outside, the bots are reluctant to go for MegaHealth in the small room. You can shoot fish in a barrel by jumping on the bounce pad over the water and picking off the bots chasing the red armor at the bottom of the pool.

It's More Fun With Friends

I t's partly the popularity of games like *Tribes*, *Team Fortress Classic*, *Rainbow Six*, and even *Half-Life* that signals *Q3A* as the last word in pure deathmatching gameplay. For some reason, the internet seems to be bringing people together to be friends, to form teams, squads, guilds, and clans. *Q3A* offers Team Deathmatch and more importantly, Capture-The-Flag — nothing new or original, but plenty of variants will appear online once the source code is finally released.

Four new CTF maps follow the same methodology of starting with very simple ideas and layouts before developing to higher concept styles. Point scoring in CTF is still a contrived assortment of factors that makes no sense, but flag captures are counted, and that's what matters.

Team game fans who still can't get decent Internet connections, despite the excellent network code, will be delighted by playing CTF with Bots. Aside from a 12-player skirmish mode where you choose the level and opponents (and their ability level), team Bot matches are awesome. In these modes a menu system of commands has been introduced that's initially very clunky, forcing you to pause out of the game, bring up the menu and then give the Bots their commands (individually or as a group). But like everything else, all the commands can be bound to

keys for quick access. (All this information is available in the HTML document on the CD, not in the printed manual).

When you want to get gritty, Bots can be instructed to camp certain weapons, fetch the flag, defend the base, roam, or even patrol. Remember though that they do have personalities. Set the Bots to defend while you glory seek for the flag and after a while they'll let you know they're bored and are leaving their post. Miserable bastards — bitch-slapping them into obeying your orders is not an option, but should be. It's also easy to set a Bot as the team leader. It will bark the orders letting you concentrate on the playing (so long as you follow said orders, of course). ▶ p. 46

Shell casings fly as you methodically pick off slow-moving targets in the water.

Watch the barrel's color and listen to it charging to time shots.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The *single-player* game also statistically tracks how much punishment you dole out. While not supporting the excellent NGStats as *UT* does, it does record several elements such as the number of "Impressives" (two consecutive railgun hits), "Excellents" (two kills in two seconds), "Perfects" (completing a level without dying), and the total number of frags you've got in all your single-player sessions.

This stuff encourages you to complete the levels in the best, most effective manner, as well as on the hardest settingsm by offering these small graphics treats. Indeed, when each level is completed the three-pronged *Q3A* logo is stamped over the snapshot in the menu. However, only the left prong is colored red (the other two beige) if you complete it on the second difficulty level. On the third, the two prongs are red, and on "Hardcore" you get the full symbol splashed on each level. For "Nightmare" sadists, a skull embossed logo is your reward for putting yourself through that torture.

DIFFICULTY

I CAN WIN
BRING IT ON
HURT ME PLENTY
HARDCORE
NIGHTMARE!

LEVEL ⟶ DM9 Hero's Keep

TACTICS ⟶ Remember, drop down to the bounce pad that throws up underneath the bridge, and onto the Red Armor ledge, then grab the railgun. Run to the other side of the map and over to the rocket launcher. There's a MegaHealth if you jump off the bounce pad in that pit.

LEVEL ⟶ Tourney4 Vertical Vengeance

TACTICS ⟶ Three things: Railgun, Red Armor, MegaHealth. Run a pattern to ensure you cover all three. Preventing Anarki from getting the railgun is key on higher levels. Remember to look for holes at the back of ledges that let you fall safely to the level below.

F.H.O.F. #2

Tourney6:
The Very End of You

This is the last level of the game — a face off against the railgunning Xaero. This level originated as a bet at Id to Tim Willits that he couldn't design a fun map in one hour. About 45 minutes later he had "Fun," as it was known internally. It dominated the Id in-house matches for a couple of weeks, before evolving (with a few structural additions and texture improvements) to this map.

To get the BFG from the floating platform, hit the accelerator pad from either main column-covered platform, don't air control, and let yourself land where the BFG lies. The reason there's an extra bounce to get there? See that floating target in the sky? Shoot it and the BFG platform roof squishes anyone stood there — or blocks any flying characters from getting to safety. Against the end boss, the best tactic is to trade railgun slugs. If you kill him, immediately switch to the rocket launcher in case he respawns on your platform, and if not, try to get him as he goes for his own railgun. Be careful of going for the red armor — it requires jumping on a bounce pad to reach the main platform, and that gentle lob is the perfect opportunity for railgun pickings.

And In Conclusion

Quake 3 Arena is certifiably a masterpiece in terms of what it has set out to achieve. You won't find any new game concepts, nor any new weapon ideas (only the grenade launcher and marvelous plasma-rocket firing BFG10K weren't released in the Q3Test), nor the most perfect deathmatching Bots. What you will find, however, is a tangible, yet indescribable "feel" of quality that gives Q3A's physics such a compelling edge over the competition. Weapon hits feel like weapon hits, as your character feels like a solid person, not a flighty cartoon. You'll also find levels designed with fighting in mind, not some preconceived notion restricting a

level's flow. They're created to be gibbing arenas, balanced for fighting. They use water, lava and slime sparingly; they judge space to be relative to the skill level of the combatants; they dispense with slow-moving elevators in favor of fast-paced accelerators and bounce pads; they work.

Originally Id claimed that Q3A's multiplayer focus was a risk. Sure it is — there's a risk that the killer elements that go towards making it so perfectly constructed, though limited in scope, will be ignored in favor of epic feature lists. It's not about feature lists; it's not about adding poorly designed new elements for the newness' sake. It's about arena combat, Quake III Arena combat, and in that regard,

it's f—king fantastic. And you can quote me on that.

— ROB SMITH *will probably be playing* Q3A *in two years time.* Unreal Tournament *will have been uninstalled long before*

GRAPHICS

Solid, beautiful, expertly presented — they serve their architectural purpose perfectly.

SOUND

Great individual grunts, screams and moans from the characters. Music is sparse and barely noticeable amidst the carnage.

DEPTH

Surprisingly there is some. A more compelling single-player game than expected, plus the online play assures endless playing time.

DESIGN

A narrow focus that's been supremely crafted. It's not an RPG, or adventure, or cerebral, but what it sets out to do, it accomplishes with great aplomb.

RATING 10

➕ Pluses
→ "Feels" so damn good
→ Plays so damn well
→ Looks so damn awesome

➖ Minuses
→ Bots not perfect
→ Still more levels needed
→ Deathmatch only (with a bit of CTF)

PR types: If you can't find some box quotes in this story, you suck!

LEVEL → DM13 Lost World

TACTICS → Control the rocket launcher area as that's where the Quad power-up appears (drop down the hole from the room above to get easy access), and you can also look down to the ledge where the Red Armor appears to check for its arrival, then drop down and snag it.

LEVEL → DM14 Grim Dungeons

TACTICS → A killer level. Know exactly where the BFG is located (it's accessed by dropping down one of the thin holes from the cathedral-like interior). Grab the BFG and armor, then make your way to the surface and take your chances in the space with the MegaHealth. Now rampage.

The Women Of Quake III

I d's modeler, Paul Steed, is quite well known for his appreciation of the female form. No surprise then that he's spent quite some time perfecting the shapes of the female Q3A models. Here are some of the finest .. and some that aren't so fine at all.

→ HUNTER

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶
"Come closer that we might spit on you"
IN THE MOVIE ⟶ Salma Hayek could fill the bra quite nicely

→ MYNX

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶
"Finally someone who knows how to handle their weapon"
IN THE MOVIE ⟶ Tawny Kitaen would be perfect

→ MAJOR

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶
"Mmm ... was it good for you?"
IN THE MOVIE ⟶ Grace Jones with some serious padding of the bra

→ SLASH

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶
"Nice moves. Like, are they yours or implants?"
IN THE MOVIE⟶ Milla Jovovich, she already has the outfit

→ LUCY

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶ "This girdle is killing me. Literally"
IN THE MOVIE ⟶ Roseanne or the fat one from Wilson Phillips

→ ALLY MCREAL

WITTY CATCH PHRASE ⟶ "Do I look fat to you?"
IN THE MOVIE ⟶ Calista Flockheart has the figure for it

F.H.O.F. #3

CTF4: Space CTF
As any expertly designed level should be, there are numerous ways to achieve various objectives. Start by hitting the accelerator pad at your base end, through the acceleration tunnel (don't air control) so you land on the rocket launcher/armor platform. From there drop to the middle platform (where the MegaHealth spawns). Then hit the accelerator back to your base — it shoots you to the very top where there's a handy railgun. This is one of the most ideal sniping spots, but also cruelly exposed to anyone taking pot shots back.

Also, in your own base, drop down from the platform below the flag to the bounce pad that shoots you way up in the air, and air control to land on the tiny moving platform. Sit right there until you collect both the BFG and MegaHealth, then jump back down and go apeshit.

When you have the flag, the quickest way back to safety is straight across the middle, not via the acceleration tunnels, though going the quick route makes you susceptible to snipers since you spend a lot of time flying through the air.

LEVEL ⟶ DM19 Apocalypse Void

TACTICS ⟶ Get the railgun from the highest platform. Don't camp here as there are two platforms that let enemies sneak up, and there's also a spawn spot there. Instead, with railgun in hand, make your way over to the platform with the Red Armor, then accelerate across to the distant ledge with the rocket launcher and quad damage. There's only one way in, so guard that and zoom in pick off opponents.

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Hitman: Codename 47

The ultimate fantasy brought to life?

Is it just me, or does everybody out there have a deep, dark desire to be a professional hit man? [*Er, murderous intentions are just your own dangerous mind grumblings, boss — Ed*] Maybe I am evil, but having watched many a movie like *Pulp Fiction*, *Grosse Point Blank*, and *The Professional*, I've always fantasized about my life as a hit man — a cleaner, an assassin, a gun for hire, the muscle — known simply as "The Fish." I can hear the dialogue now ... "You're calling in The Fish? Shit, that's all you had to say." Now if the game *Hitman* delivers on its promise, I'll get to lead my life of professional crime and have none of the annoying realities of guilt and remorse — ah, the beauty of games.

Just the premise of this game alone is worthy of anticipation, but what really makes *Hitman* stand out initially is the awe-inspiring graphics. Unknown developer IO interactive has created its own engine called Glacier, and it's one of the niftier we've seen in quite some time. The laundry list of engine capabilities is filled with the usual volumetric-shadow-fogging nonsense, but the basic fact is that it looks amazing. The cloth-technology (not the real name, but you know what I'm talking about) means that flags blow in the wind and plants sway in the breeze. Combined with the amazing physics, this engine creates some unreal gameplay moments.

Every item is available for interaction (i.e. shot to bits) and it doesn't stop there. If you shoot a vase (or any object for that matter) it breaks into different particles and shatters all over the floor — cool, but pretty standard stuff, right? The twist is that those particles are now part of the environment and characters have to step on them or walk around them. Not real exciting game stuff, but this total interaction could lead to some amazingly unique gameplay paradigms (with thanks to *Next Generation* magazine for letting us borrow their big word).

Even dead bodies are objects in the world with which you can interact. In one gruesome moment we witnessed, the developer shot a hooker, then dragged around the flaccid body by her ankle, then her head, and finally her wrist — brutal, but impressive.

Beyond the unique premise and stunning technology, *Hitman* is a first- or third-person shooter with an emphasis on stealth and tactical problem solving. The game unfolds over five chapters and there will be several sub-missions in each chapter before the final hit. The gameplay isn't going to be simply "run into a room and shoot all the bad guys." Instead, each hit is going to require planning, recon, and finally execution.

However, the developers promise there will be plenty of intense gun battles along the way. There is a sixth and final showdown, but only players who uncover the scattered hints throughout the game will figure out who the real enemy is — an interesting twist to say the least. The missions take place all over the globe in locations such as Hong Kong, South American jungles, Rotterdam, and a strip club (apparently a required feature in all new Eidos games), but we're not complaining. Each of the immense worlds are beautiful and ripe for all kinds of hits. ▶ p. 53
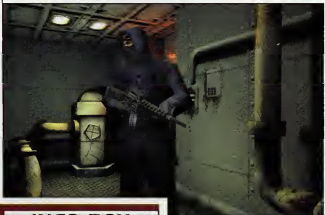
We're hoping this isn't a disguise, because if we see a bald guy in a black suit our first instinct is to run for cover — or pay a cover.

Hitman Gallery

For those who are shocked and offended by one of these screenshots, you must realize that those are not real breasts. They are merely a collection of polygons and textures which you perceive to be breasts. Question reality!

Excuse me, but would you please leave the garden.
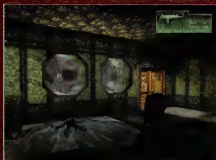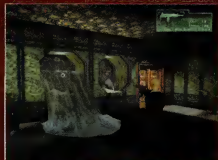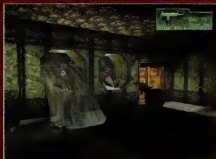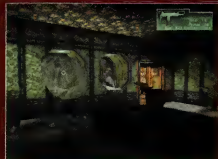
Here's a perfect example of the potential of *Hitman*. The end goal is to take out some supposedly evil guy in this restaurant. But there are different ways of doing it. For example, you shoot out this fish tank, which spills water on the floor and knocks down the people sitting down for dinner. Now with the henchman on the ground you can stick a bullet in your target and get out safely. Of course, you could just come in and shoot up everything and everybody (but that would be much tougher).

FIVE QUESTIONS

RATHER THAN EATING A STICKY-SWEET DANISH, WE DECIDED TO QUIZ ONE. SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE SUGAR-FILLED ANSWERS OF *HITMAN* PRODUCER, JONAS ENEROTH.

Q: If *Hitman* were allowed to roam free in a mythical land of video game characters, who would you have him put a cap in first?

A: Jar Jar Binks (™ and copyright of its original owner ...) The IK system [Fancy acronym for things that flop in the wind. Ed] can really do his floppy ears justice as they follow the rest of his body in a wide arc from standing, to stone cold dead on the ground. The physics of this will just be ... awesome. While in video game land I think *Hitman* would visit Ms. Croft as well, the jury's still out on shooting or just a bit of plain old R&R, or both — in no particular order.

Q: What is the inspiration for Hitman?

A: Killing Jar Jar Binks — wait, I'm still savoring the last question. The intent behind *Hitman* is a story-driven game that is playable on a number of different levels. To frame it appropriately we have to stay away from the sanitized Hollywood-esque plots of so many related movies. You are a *Hitman* after all, why would you be nice about it?

Q: The strip club level — is this a requirement enforced by Eidos, or just a good, well balanced level?

A: They have been featured quite heavily in recent games and I think it's a way for us (and several other publishers) to justify somewhat large expense bills doing "research."

Q: *The Professional* or *Assassins*?

A: A bit like asking, Chewie or Jar Jar ... Leon (*The Professional*) and *La Femme Nikita* both serve as inspiration and aspirations. *Assassins*? No thanks!

Q: Were there any animals harmed in the making of this game?

A: Yes. But Eidos is paying them royalties so it's ok.

Never know what you'll find in the back of a Chinese restaurant.

◄ **p. 51** The early version we saw didn't have a lot of the core gameplay in place, but the developers talked about using disguises, hiding guns in toilets (á la *The Godfather*), and generally making an extremely rich world in which the hits are planned to really look and feel like hits.

Everything sounds great, but I do have my concerns. Getting the incredible detail that this game promises is not going to be an easy task. It's going to require enemies and targets that think and react realistically; without that crucial element, this game could just be another filed in the bulging bag of "good idea, poor execution." The Jackal-like killer in me is hoping that they can get it right, so that those fantasies don't have to be realized in some other, more terrifying way. ►

— **MIKE SALMON** *knows a guy who can take care of "problems" ... just be worried*

Enemies hide weapons in the strangest places ...

THE HIT LIST

If we were paid assassins, there are targets we might take out for the good of the world

Ricky Martin
WHY → His gyrating hips, Latino smile, and perfectly toned body makes us all look bad. Besides, he was in Menudo
SNAPPY POST-ASSASSINATION CATCH-PHRASE → "Dying La Vida Loca"

Laetitia Casta
WHY → She's too damn hot, and taunts us with her beauty
SNAPPY POST-ASSASSINATION CATCH-PHRASE → "What have I done?!"

Joel Schumacher
WHY → *Batman & Robin*. Ruined a perfectly good movie with close-ups of leather-clad buttocks
SNAPPY POST-ASSASSINATION CATCH-PHRASE → "I got your butt shot right here"

Dinky, The Taco Bell Chihuahua
WHY → Do we need a reason to chop up this hairless canine and serve him up in a Chihuahua Chalupa?
SNAPPY POST-ASSASSINATION CATCH-PHRASE → "Drop the Chihuahua"

Note: *We wouldn't really kill anybody! Killing people is just wrong, no matter how much they deserve it. If some deranged i-coder takes this as a plea to kill someone, we are not responsible in any way for their complete stupidity. IT'S A JOKE!*

"Your name isn't on the list and you aren't a hot girl. Get lost!"
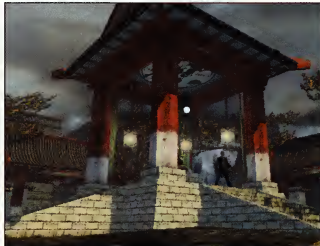
The Glacier engine really produces some fantastic visuals.

53

JOHN McCLANE STUNT DOUBLE #134
- STEPPED ON PROXIMITY MINE NEAR
ROULETTE TABLE WHILE BATTLING TERRORISTS.

JOHN McCLANE STUNT DOUBLE #18
-HEADWOUND FROM HIGH SPEED WRECK WHILE
ATTEMPTING EXTREME DRIVING DOWN VEGAS STRIP.
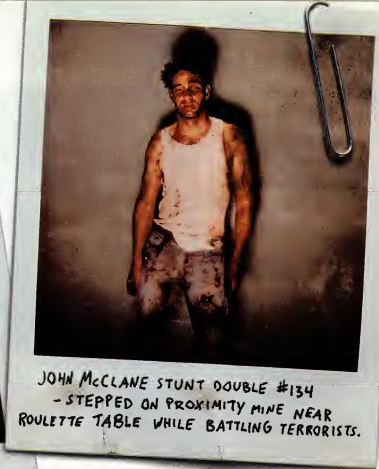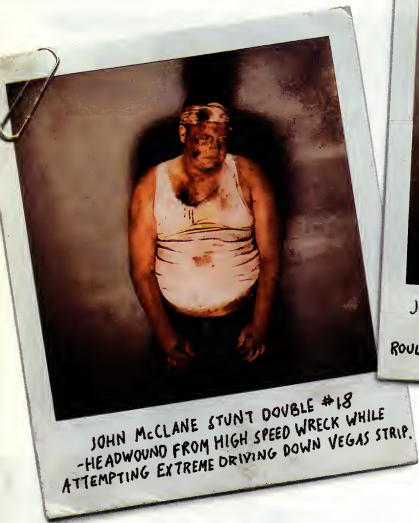
THEY COULDN'T HANDLE BEING
JOHN McCLANE. CAN YOU?

JOHN McCLANE STUNT DOUBLE # 56
- ARM BROKEN NEAR SLOT MACHINES IN
SHARPSHOOTERS DUEL WITH A RUSSIAN TERRORIST.

McCLANE IN 3RD PERSON ACTION MODE.
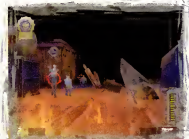
McCLANE IN SHARPSHOOTER MODE.

McCLANE IN EXTREME DRIVING MODE.

FLEX YOUR SKILLS IN ONE OF THREE
UNIQUE GAME MODES. OR MIX ALL
THREE MODES INTO ONE INTENSE
STORY-DRIVEN DIE HARD ADVENTURE.

IF YOU LIKED THE ORIGINAL BEST-SELLING DIE HARD TRILOGY, THE SEQUEL
MAY JUST BLOW YOUR MIND. IT STILL HAS 3 INTENSE GAME MODES, BUT
NOW McCLANE IS BATTLING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS IN LAS VEGAS WITH
BETTER GRAPHICS, SMARTER ENEMIES, MORE HIGH-POWERED WEAPONS,
FASTER CARS AND A LOT MORE ODDS STACKED AGAINST HIM. SO TRY TO
SAVE SIN CITY—JUST MAKE SURE YOU ALSO SAVE YOUR OWN BUTT.

Go to **http://pcxl.ign.com/gaming411**: Product Number 138

WHO ARE THEY?

Some time ago, Microsoft Research came up with an idea to create a massively multiplayer space combat game. Initially conceived as a technology research project, that element was canned in favor of developing what they felt was evolving into a compelling action/strategy/online game. And if it doesn't work, it's all just research ...

Allegiance

Microsoft's got a killer new app — and we've played it

The holidays were a banner time for those of us who appreciate the delicate aesthetics of exit wounds. Games like *Half-Life: Opposing Force, Unreal Tournament,* and *Quake III Arena* reminded us the simple, Biblical charms of blasting and smiting. But now Microsoft wants to enter the action-multiplayer arena not with an FPS, but with the rather ambitious — and less acronym friendly — MMSCS (work it out for yourself), *Allegiance.*

The **PCXL** staff was a little suspicious. It *is* Microsoft after all, and while we love our OS overlords, be all have to get wet-wired and download DirectX 8.0 directly into our skulls. And *Allegiance* looks a little like one of those action games that forces us to use something above the brain stem.

To make sense of this concept we asked Executive Producer Joel Dehlin why traditional FPS gamers should put down their mice and pick up *Allegiance.* "Mainly because we've found in our research that devoted *Quake* and *Unreal* players are sleeping at least three hours per night. This is time that should, nay, *must* be filled with *Allegiance* playing time. Second, people who are familiar with typical FPS controls have a blast, whereas they may not have enjoyed space action games previously. Finally, having objectives — as a team — makes this game very interesting to those types of players." Uh-huh.

That's all well and good, Joel, but there are some of us who find those topsy-turvy space combat sims a little too disorienting. And

since the **PCXL** staff prefers to do its gaming on a full stomach of Twinkies and Old Milwaukee, will we be spewing our contents across the keyboard?

"There are a number of things we've done to try to make space less disorienting — some subtle, some not so," explains Lead Designer Rob Girling. "We've gotten rid of the 3D radar system and replaced it with a simple 3D arrow pointing to your target, while gutter icons inform you of things in your vicinity." He goes on to say "We've also included a visible but distant background galactic plane that gives players a subtle indica-
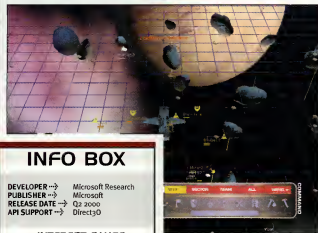
INFO BOX

DEVELOPER →	Microsoft Research
PUBLISHER →	Microsoft
RELEASE DATE →	Q2 2000
API SUPPORT →	Direct3D

INTEREST GAUGE

INTERESTED — EXCITED — AROUSED
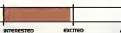
THE HYPE

Microsoft puts its mammoth resources into a massive, multiplayer-only, squad-based, exploration, resource management space combat sim. Have they left anything out?

THE HURDLE

There's a bit of a learning curve, casual gamers tend to get disoriented in space sims, and primarily squad-based games sometimes put your chances of fun in the clutches of moronic teammates.

THE HIT

Think Team Fortress meets Freespace 2 and you'll understand why we're interested.
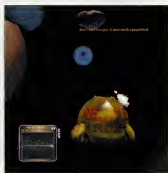
The command overview can be accessed by any player to get a bird's-eye view of the action.

Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars ...

FIVE QUESTIONS

JOEL DEHLIN AND ROB GIRLING OF MICROSOFT RESEARCH TOOK A BREAK FROM CONQUERING THE WORLD TO ANSWER OUR QUERIES.

Q: Will gamers only be able to play the game on the Zone?

A: [Joel] We include the server in the box, so you can buy the game and play for free forever on Internet servers. You can also join the "*Allegiance* Zone," which has extra cool stuff like new factions (civilizations), in-game squadron support, stats, and special events.

Q: Will players be able to hop in and out of a game à la deathmatch?

A: [Rob] Players have a bunch of game types that they can create or join. If you're on the Zone you can hop in and out of persistent arena combats that are essentially huge deathmatch games. We also have Capture the Flag, Artifacts, Prosperity, regular Deathmatch, and Conquest games.

Q: Will players be able to switch roles in mid-mission?

A: [Rob] Certainly. Often we found that in smaller games you need a kind of "rush goalie" commander who, when the base is under attack, will switch roles and help fend off the attackers. In other situations we see commanders who will take out the Cruiser and lead the offensive.

Q: Do you ever get tired of obnoxious geeks who point out that your weapons make sounds even though space is a vacuum?

A: [Rob] Never! I really like it when people point out that kind of interesting and most accurate fact. *[Note: Rob's original comment was deemed unprintable, so we substituted this response ourselves.]*

Q: Is there any truth to the rumor that Billy Gates likes to squeeze off a few rounds as a beta tester for *Allegiance* and that his call sign is "Luscious"?

A: [Joel] That is classified information. Let's just say this: If you kill the wrong person, you may find your operating system deleting your hard drive.

tion of their orientation relative to the plane of the galaxy."

That sounded good to us, so we fired up the beta and grabbed our force-feedback sticks. And sure enough, Rob's right — the flying in *Allegiance* isn't too confusing. The combat takes place between enormous bases and wormholes, all of which have wisely been put on the same plane. So even though players are free to fly in any direction, our experience with the beta testers is that most people stick to a general plane of battle.

Anyone who has played multiplayer *Descent* battles will be comfortable flying in *Allegiance*. There are standard ammo, energy, and missile weapons and you'll have to keep track of fuel, shields, and hull before hauling the craft back to base. Flying without a radar takes

some adjustment, but the icon system is pretty effective. But like any combat game, no amount of radar is going to help you when all holy hell breaks loose, and we witnessed some truly awesome space carnage on our voyages.

Although there will be arenas set aside for the "loner with a boner," the game is primarily designed for teamplay. Matches can last up to an hour, with teams struggling to gain control of bases and asteroids while rushing to develop technology trees, so that even better weapons and ships can be rolled out. All the unlucky players who find that they don't have the bandwidth to dogfight can participate by being a scout, investor, or even a commander, barking out orders with the game's built-in voice commands.

Playing on the Zone will be a community-building experience. There will be massively multiplayer battles (well over 32 players), new civilizations, and player rankings. Individuals' stats and scores can be posted for the world to see, and there will even be a sophisticated ranking system for squadrons.

Although the game has just entered beta stage, it looks pretty damn polished. The fighting engine is in place, the sounds are incredibly realistic, and the graphics are pretty sweet. But whether that's enough to get devoted railgun jockeys to leave behind their precious gravity remains to be seen. You can be sure we'll have all the details in **PCXL** this spring. ▶

— JIM PRESTON's *allegiance is to the person who's paying the most*

Mmmm ... pretty colors! They make tedious tasks like finding your way around more ... colorful.

Aureal 3D For Your Ears

SQ1500 & SQ2500

PRICE →	$79 SQ1500 and $100 SQ2500
WEBSITE →	www.a3d.com
BUNDLE →	SQ2500: *Drakan* and *Heretic II*, *Slave Zero* OEM. SQ1500: *Drakan*

Aureal feeds the aural fire with a triumvirate of scorchin' sound cards. Their three solutions are targeted to quench the thirst of the low-end, while satiating the hunger of the high-end power user. The introductory SQ1500 and the gaming-focused SQ2500 are available now, with the SQ3500 timed to surface with the new upcoming A3D 3.0 technology in late January.

All three boards include a digital coaxial S/PDIF connector (which you simply *must* have!) and offer multichannel quad-speaker support much like Diamond's Vortex 2 Monster MX-300. Curiously though, they don't come bundled with their own DVD decoding software. Using CyberLink's PowerDVD v2.0 software hooked to quad speakers, we could only hear the

two left/right stereo channels and not the four discrete channels that Diamond's MX-300 and bundled Zoran software delivers. You'll need theater speakers and an external Dolby Digital decoder to utilize the S/PDIF connector and full DVD sound.

After a bit of testing, we found the SQ1500 to be your basic low-cost introductory soundcard. It utilizes Aureal's Vortex 1 technology with acceleration of their A3D 1.0 and A3D 2.0 standards being software-based. It's decent for playing basic games, music, system sounds and little else. We recommend that you go ahead and spend the extra $30 for the Vortex 2-based SQ2500.

The SQ2500 has hardware support for A3D 1.0 and 2.0 and can support 76 concurrent 3D streams. Like the MX-300, the card handles games using Aureal's wavetracing technology (where 3D positional sounds are modeled according to the game's environments) smoothly and deftly.

Oh, if only "adult" DVD had 3D surround sound …

The real power will arrive with the SQ3500. It'll accelerate A3D 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 via hardware, will include an on-board Motorola 100MHz DSP56362 chip for DSP-powered studio-quality reverb, and pack a built-in Dolby Digital decoder. Expect to see the SQ3500 to pack a price tag of $200. ▶

SQ1500
6 RATING

SQ2500
RATING 8

➕ Pluses
→ SQ2500: Excellent support of A3D 2.0 games
→ Nice game bundle

➖ Minuses
→ No bundled DVD software
→ No discrete quad-channel analog support for DVD software

All Backed Up
Onstream DI3030

Backing up your hard drive is one of those snoozefests that most of us put off until it's too late because swapping a bunch of disks, tapes, or cartridges feels like a waste of time. But how would you feel if you could back up your *entire* hard drive (or multiple drives) at once, giving you enough free time to catalogue your collection of midget porn tapes? Like a creepy pervert, probably, but at least you'd be a creepy pervert with a backed up hard drive and no worries.

Enter the Onstream DI30 30 Gigabyte internal IDE digital drive

from ADR. Yes, that's right – 30 Gigabytes! That's more than enough room to store all the dirty pictures and MP3s you've been

saving up over the years onto one cartridge. Oh, and we hear you can save important stuff like your boot drive and registry information in
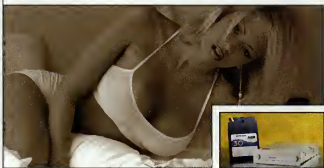
Just imagine how much porn you could fit on 30 gigs …

case all the bad karma you've built up trying to scam chicks in chat rooms comes back to haunt you by crashing your hard drive in a spectacular blue screen of death.

The Onstream also comes in internal and external SCSI versions as well as an external that connects to your parallel port. It comes with the easy-to-use Echo backup manager software that averaged speeds of 25MB-45MB/minute in our tests. At $299 (and $39.95 per cartridge), the Onstream digital drive is well worth the peace of mind it'll bring you. For more information, check out www.onstream.com. ▶

Saitek
ST110 Joystick

PRICE →	$19.95
WEBSITE →	www.saitek.com
BUNDLE →	none

Saitek has made a name for itself by producing quality peripherals at low prices, and the ST110 joystick is no exception. Though lightweight, it's surprisingly stable for a stick with such a small footprint, probably because of the five rubber feet and odd teardrop shape of the base. The ST110 is also one of the most comfortable joysticks to come through our offices. The handle fit the grip of my hand perfectly with every button in easy reach. Speaking of buttons, there are four — a trigger and three on the head. The base

throttle is very smooth and sturdy, a real plus considering how loose and cheap-feeling throttles have been on some new sticks lately. What sets the ST110 apart

Do you want it soft or do you want it hard?

from the rest is a Precision Tension Control that lets you gradually change the stick tension between soft and hard (a feature women would like to see in guys, no doubt.) If you're in the market for a budget stick, this is high on the shopping list.

RATING 9

⊕ Pluses
→ Ergonomic + economical = Ergonomical
→ Good throttle

⊖ Minuses
→ Could use more buttons
→ Won't cuddle after gameplay

Guillemot
Force Feedback Racing Wheel

PRICE →	$129.99
WEBSITE →	www.guillemot.com
BUNDLE →	Monaco Grand Prix demo, SpeedBusters demo

Once you've played a racing game with a wheel, you can never go back to the klunky keyboard. There have been a ton of wheels released, but they have hardly raced on a technology curve. This means most buyers in the market are new to wheels, and Guillemot's latest option is desperately close to being superb. But it does have faults, and current wheel owners should think twice about what they've got before sticking down the cash for this new entry.

Backed by an official endorsement from über-maker Ferrari, this wheel looks the part and has tons of useful features. The metallic-looking central piece of the wheel housing the familiar Ferrari logo is plastic, doing a

great job of impersonating weighty and expensive metal. Similarly, the silver-colored plastic pedals are the weakest part of the setup. While they're well spaced and a good size, the spring is very light, requiring very little pressure to push, and therefore making tiny speed adjustments as you ease off or on the gas that much more difficult.

The force feedback is subtle and performed well in both *Need For Speed: High Stakes* (where driving a Ferrari with a Ferrari wheel was as near to the real thing as I'm ever likely to get) and *TOCA 2* racing. Both these games are included among 10 "preset" configurations that come as part of the setup software. Unfortunately, both the presets failed to let me circumvent the in-game calibration — *NFS* had the brake as the gas. Also, calibration for *TOCA* took several races to get right – the mechanism that creates the force feedback had a tendency to catch when steering for a long, fast corner, causing me

to over-steer and ultimately crash out. Since turning force feedback off is not an option, it made for more difficult control than a several year old Thrustmaster T2 did.

Still, the wheel itself feels absolutely fantastic. The grip is great, the size perfect, and the array of buttons (two four-direction hats, two buttons, plus four under-wheel levers and a separate gear stick) make this one of the most feature-loaded sticks available.

I'd suggest testing it with your favorite game at the store if you can, so you're fully aware of some of the intricacies of the peripheral. Such is its excellent "feel," I'm going to stick with it and get it configured in the presets perfectly — then those lap records should come tumbling. ➤

RATING 7

⊕ Pluses
→ Excellent on-wheel features
→ Simple USB setup
→ Great feel

⊖ Minuses
→ Weak-springed pedals
→ Calibration issues despite the "presets"
→ Internal mechanism may limit some precise movement

Either love is in the air, or someone farted.

If anyone had witnessed the Seattle WTO-type riot that occurred here during our endless Q3A vs. *Unreal Tournament* arguments, they would've thought we were all UFC contestants out for blood. Actually, so many good games came out this month that we didn't have much else to argue about. Chuck fell in love with *Gabriel Knight 3* and cried at all the girly love scenes, Matt stopped browsing Internet porn to play *SWAT 3*, *Close Combat 4* got our heart beating pitter-pat, and we all wound up playing *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. It was the shining quality of these titles that helped us make it through some of the less fortunate games — *Interstate '82* dumped us, *Slave Zero* wouldn't talk to us after The Big O, and *Ultima Ass-cension* slapped us in the face with its poor performance. For better or worse, richer or poorer, we wrote these reviews for you, our favorite reader.

This month, "it's all good." Mostly.

WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN

Laetitia Casta. So hot it drops nukes in its drink to cool 'em down **(10)**

Atomic explosion — 10, 000 thousand times hotter than the surface of the sun. We're still smoking it's so good **(9)**

Core of the sun, sweetheart — over 27 million degrees. That's one spicy f—king meatball **(8)**

Butane torch — 2300° F. We're talking just enough to get you hot and bothered **(7)**

Beachfront property on Venus — 466° F (hot enough to melt lead). Lead, yes. Your heart, maybe **(6)**

Rubbing your hands together — 100° F. It takes some effort to warm up to games like this **(5)**

Cold Pizza. If there's nothing else, this will keep death away for a while **(4)**

Nude sunbathing ... in New York ... in the winter ... is more fun **(3)**

About as hot as the shoulder of that Prada bag-toting debutante you invited to the wet T-shirt contest **(2)**

A witch's tit in October ... at the bottom of a coal mine ... after Earth has spun off into deep space **(1)**

KILLER GAME

Any game that receives a 9 or 10 from our rigorous scoring system warrants this nifty logo. If you see the **PC ACCELERATOR** Killer Game stamp, you know it's a game worth buying. Only the true classics deserve this elite status, so don't expect to see this symbol often.

Killer game!

SUICIDE

If we're going to create a stamp for the truly great, then it's only fair to label the unforgivable shit as well. It takes an abysmal score of a 2 or 1 to qualify for the mouse around the neck. Heed our warning: Stay away from these games at all costs.

SUICIDE

ALL NIGHT LONG

"Well my friends the time has come, to break the rules and have some fun ..." Just like Lionel Richie used to sing (and probably still does at his sold-out gigs at Holiday inns across the midwest), these are the games that kept us up "All Night Long." Come on, carouse, fiesta, forever.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
Publisher → GT Interactive
Developer → Epic
Rating → 9
How good is it? Far and away one of the best multiplayer games ever made — with net code that makes us forget *Unreal*

SWAT 3
Publisher → Sierra Studios
Developer → Sierra Studios
Rating → 9
How good is it? Close Quarters Battle done to perfection itself, minus a point for no multiplayer

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3
Publisher → Sierra Studios
Developer → Sierra Studios
Rating → 8
How good is it? Chuck loves it and it's a *girl's* game. What does that tell you? It's a pretty kick-ass game, that's what. It also says that Chuck has way too much time on his hands. Go Jane, Go Jane ...

THE COUCH

The couch is a funny piece of furniture. 90% of the time, there's nowhere we'd rather be. Those are the games we might think about during the other 10% — those miserable hours when our girlfriends punish us for playing *Quake* all night and forgetting it was "date night."

NBA BASKETBALL 2000
Publisher → Fox Sports Interactive
Developer → Radical Entertainment
Rating → 3
How bad is it? The only good thing about this game is that it allowed us to use the term, "ass-ketball"

ULTIMA ASCENSION
Publisher → Electronic Arts
Developer → Origin
Rating → 4
How bad is it? To release something so revered as the final *Ultima* in such an aspectular condition as this is just wrong.

**INDIANA JONES AND
THE INFERNAL MACHINE**
Publisher → LucasArts
Developer → LucasArts
Rating → 5
How bad is it? I know Indiana Jones, and Lara Croft is no Indiana Jones, no matter how much LucasArts wants to make me think so

ACCELE-RATED >>

This additional rating provides specific information on how a game performs on a variety of competing 3D chipsets. We test games on up to four major 3D cards and report back with the true test for any 3D accelerator: how it affects the game. We base these ratings on graphic enhancements, framerates, and performance to give you a good idea of how a game will perform on your 3D card.

(Note: Performance may vary depending on the card and the setup of your system)

ACCELE-RATED

In this little box you'll find out all you need to know about the 3D-ness of the game. We'll talk about different cards, problems, and specifics to help you decide if the game is right for your system. Also, you can use this information to decide what kind of system you need in order to play the games you're lusting after. Occasionally we'll also throw in dirty words and helpful life advice. So read carefully, ok?

RATINGS >>

Our rating scale is a simple 1 to 10 — no decimal points, no obscure percentages, just a straight score that gets right to the point. Before we score games, they undergo countless hours of testing on different systems, with different 3D cards — our reviewers even play the games under the influence of various narcotics. In the end we stamp a single score on the game, which is essentially a numeric value of the game's worth. We love games and always try to look on the bright side, but when a pile of steaming crap comes in, we won't hold back and allow our readers to waste their money on said crap. You can count on our reviews for honesty, insight, and maybe even a few laughs.

GRAPHICS
Rendering quality, framerates, and special effects all contribute to an immersive gaming experience.

SOUND
Visceral sound effects and appropriate music can help make a good game great.

DEPTH
How often and how long you find yourself playing a game are good indicators of its quality.

DESIGN
The backbone of a game is the overall vision behind it, from characters and weapons to levels and missions.

RATING **(8)**

PC ACCELERATOR   February 2000   Two 10's and five 9's in this issue!! Have we gone soft? Read on and find out ...

http://www.pcxl.com

63

Unreal Tournament

You can all stop your bitchin' — the game has finally arrived

ACCELE-RATED

Supports TNT1 and 2, ATI Rage 128, 3Dfx Voodoo1, 2, 3, Rush, and Banshee, nVidia, PowerVR, Savage3D and 4, and Intel Real3D, as well as Direct3D and Glide, though its OpenGL support isn't impressive.

No one will argue that squad-based or cooperative multiplayer gaming is "the shit." Bringing the slower pace of a *Rainbow Six*-style experience to a wicked new level is *Unreal Tournament*, showcasing new styles of multiplayer action, including traditional gib-soaked deathmatch and team-based frag fests. For once, believe all the hype. *Unreal Tournament* is da bomb!

Aside from the typical deathmatches (traditional and team-based) and capture-the-flag modes, *Unreal Tournament* has added Assault and Domination. In Assault, Defenders and Attackers compete under a time limit. The Attackers must invade the enemy base and destroy one or more objectives, ranging from shutting down a power generator and taking over a ship to jumping on a moving train from a helicopter and hijacking it. The game ends when the last objective is completed or when the timer runs out.

In Domination, two or more teams score points for maintaining control of key locations called Control Points. A player can control a specific point by remaining on it for four seconds if it was previously unoccupied, or eight seconds if it was previously controlled by another team. It's a setup very similar to the *Team Fortress Classic* Map 1: Canalzone 2/Territorial Control — and there's nothing wrong with borrowing good ideas.

It should be noted that *Unreal Tournament* is strictly a multiplayer game, whether you're playing against Bots or other players online. There is no single-player, mission-based progression, though training missions for each different game type allow newbies to get up to speed with the nuances of each mode.

Enhanced AI makes it possible for Bots to be more intelligent than basic killing machines. They navigate the levels well and understand how lifts operate. They can swim, trigger doors, and use pickup items (such as toxin suits and asbestos boots) to their benefit.

In addition, Bots have improved weapon-handling skills to help them determine which weapon to use in a specific situation. For example, a Bot will not fire a rocket launcher at an enemy if that enemy is near a team member — it knows that it might inflict damage on a fellow team member (useful, but hardly realistic if any of our office team games are any indicator. If it's an enemy, you shoot it with the biggest gun you're packing, regardless of any retards who might get in the way).

Another new feature is the ability to issue orders to your team of Bots. A virtual menu allows you to easily assign orders to specific team members. For example, you can tell two Bots to cover you, while instructing another to go for the flag. The Bots also respond, with comments ranging from "Got it!" to "On the way!" or "I got your back!" Your Bots will even taunt the other team (or even you) in deathmatch games. It's kinda cool to hear Bots shout out, "Eat this!" "You suck!" or "Take that Bitch!" after a kill. If you accidentally shoot a team member, they scream back at you, "Same team!" or "I'm on your team, idiot!" Damn ingrates.

Every weapon has been given a facelift, with impressive new textures and models. New weapons
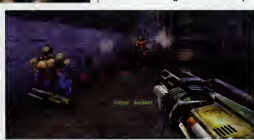
"You walked in. I walked up. Never seen a pretty girl look so tough, baby. You got that look. Yes you do."

Rank 1 / 5   Name: Nikki   0   100   28

"I knew a bot named Nikki, I guess you could say she was a sex fiend. Caught her in a hotel lobby, masturbating to a magazine"
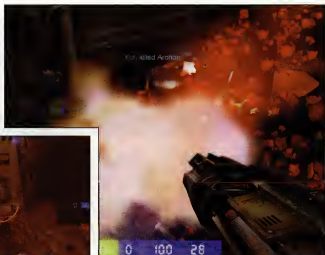
"The sky was all purple, there were people running everywhere. Judge and run from the distruction, you'd know I didn't even care"

UNREAL TORMENT

Unreal Tournament sounds so much like "Unreal Torment" that we decided to take a quick look at some very cruel, quite unusual, and especially rancid methods of torture

POKER IN THE REAR
WHAT IT IS → The wrong-doer was lowered onto a sharpened pole so that it pierced his anus. Gravity would force the sharp spike up through his body, before reaching his skull and eventually (and mercifully) killing him
MODERN-DAY EQUIVALENT → The butt plug

RAT FACE
WHAT IT IS → Hungry rats have been used through the ages to torture the evil. Caged rats would be placed over the face of the miscreant, with the torturer ready to open a little gate to let them at the flesh of the unnecessary information wasn't given
MODERN-DAY EQUIVALENT → Jeffrey Dahmer

SCOTTISH SOUFFLE
WHAT IT IS → Hung, Drawn, and Quartered (HD&Q): It's an oft-used phrase, but do you know what it means? Hang-ing's obvious, but the sufferer was brought down before he was dead. Then he was laid on a table while a hooked instrument was inserted in his stomach and "drawn" up his body, ripping open the chest and exposing his organs. Amazingly, many people survived up until this point. Then they were then chopped into quarters — bye bye
MODERN-DAY EQUIVALENT → Being forced to watch the Lifetime movie *Hey, Gimme Back My Baby* then lis-tening to "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Michael Bolton until you crack into pieces
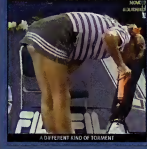
include a Translocator, a telepor-tation device you activate to place the Destination Module anywhere in the level, thus you can activate the Source Module when you need to get there in an instant. It's also a great way of getting a cheap telefrag kill — throw the destina-tion at an enemy, then activate — everyone knows that two bodies can't occupy the same space.

And the Redeemer, in a word, f—king rocks (well, two words). When this rocket-powered nuke hits a surface, it explodes and sends out a pulverizing shock wave, instantly vaporizing any-thing in its path. The alternate fire mode lets you control the rocket like a smart bomb to home in on a target. *Unreal Tournament* also introduces a melee-type weapon — the IMPACT Hammer. This hydraulic steam-powered mashing device pounds enemies by build-ing up pressure that's then

"Darling if you want me to ... U! I would die 4 U."

unleashed on anyone caught standing too close.

Unreal Tournament really shows off innovative level design, too. Even the typical deathmatch levels of dark corridors and enclosed arenas are jazzed up with cool environmental and mood effects and particularly effective use of lighting. Some of the levels are truly original. One level, Galleon, takes place on a ship with tower-ing masts and flapping sails.

Another level, Pressure, lets you close the door on unsuspecting enemies who walk into a pressure chamber, flick a switch, and then watch from safety as the hapless victim expands larger and larger, until they finally explode. Possibly the most entertaining map is the Overlord Assault map, a homage to the beach invasion carnage so brutally depicted in *Saving Private Ryan*. (I bet the D-Day infantry wish they had something like the

Redeemer to make quick work of the Nazi trash.)

Everything in *Unreal Tourna-ment*, from the graphics and level design, to the simple, effective menu interface, is nothing short of excellent. Even the much-maligned *Unreal* network play is up to snuff. Looks like *Quake III* has more than a little competition.

— TOM HAM's *journalistic credi-bility is being diminished each time he writes for PCXL*

DEVELOPER → Turbine
PUBLISHER → Microsoft
REQUIRED → P166, 32MB RAM, 170MB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM, 28.8 modem
IDEAL → PII 300, 64 MB RAM, sound card, 3D accelerator

Asheron's Call

If you make it, they will pay

ACCELE-RATED

No 3D hardware required in *Asheron's Call*. But if you want the textures to look smoother and more detailed, have a 16-32MB 3D card handy.

A pparently Microsoft got tired of waiting for the real world to swear fealty to it and decided to just go ahead, make its own world, and charge everyone $10 a month to live in it. Starting with the creation of your character, *Asheron's Call* maintains an unwavering focus on stats. Your attributes and skills improve by doling out XP earned through combat. The items you find are rated by rarity, value, and abilities. Even monsters each have a detailed page of stats, and brother, you better pay attention to them if you don't want to end up as a pair of blood-squirting shoes.

Players who like their steel cold and blood hot while in combat will appreciate the variety of tactics yielded by the speed/power slider for attacks, wherein you can choose to take a quick low damage poke or a ponderous but potentially fatal lunge at your enemy. This feature, along with the attack height setting (high/medium/low), make combat more than just hitting "attack" and watching the results.

Those who want to get their Gandalf-on will find themselves researching spell formulas and talking to other mages who might share their findings. Since each casting of a particular spell makes it less effective, I loved (in a real geeky sort of way) discovering a new spell and knowing I was one of a small number of mages who knew it.

Another feature unique to *AC* is the Allegiance system, which allows powerful players to give items and information to those who choose to swear "fealty" to them (or you could say, "being their bitches"). Those who swear (fealty, not just four letter words) become vassals who, with every XP, generate extra XP that their liege then acquires. Although it's essentially just a pyramid selling scheme, it worked wonders getting me quickly equipped and integrated into *AC*'s social scene.

Talking to other players can be quite beneficial in this game. Many, however, choose to go solo, because breaking fealty holds stiff penalties in the form of losing XP and earning a reputation as an oath-breaker. With a game this social, it sucks to be "massively multi-hated." "Twinking," as it was known on the *Everquest* servers, was frowned on, but in *AC* it's a built-in part of the game design.

The only major disappointment was finding the games' beautiful landscape and architecture laid low by primitive and bland modeling. Many of the monsters are pitiful and the lack of anything but human players makes the game look amateurish when engaged in

combat or discussion. That said, *AC* has more than enough adventure in it to cater to a new generation of insomniacs. ▶

— MATT HOLMES *played D&D in a janitor closet in grade school*

All the fun of a mall without mall security.

My favorite magic, the "Zap Nads" spell.

The heroes in Derreth simply love *Riverdonce*.

I guess this empty wasteland was built on an old Indian burial ground!

GRAPHICS
Landscape is beautiful. Spells are pretty. Buildings look great. The modeler should be shot.

SOUND
Environmental sound is good, but everything else is sparse and generally pretty cheap.

DEPTH
It's a roleplayers *Freecell*. Jump on, have fun, jump off. Repeat forever.

DESIGN
Spotty. You may laugh at how pitiful some of the monsters are.

RATING 8

➕ Pluses
→ Landscape. I can't say it enough
→ Magic is a RPG nerd's dream
→ Friendlier than EQ

Minuses ➖
→ Models look like Captain Ass did them
→ Quests are a bit too vague
→ Not enough "trade" skills

THE QUEST FOR VICTORY WILL TAKE YOU JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE.

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SURFACE

UNDERGROUND

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METAL FATIGUE

ORBIT   SURFACE   UNDERGROUND

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PC CD ROM

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www.metalfatigue.com

Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine

What do you get when you take Lara's ass out of *Tomb Raider*?

ACCELE-RATED

It might as well use the *TR* engine. Textures are sharp, and Indy looks okay, but the landscape and characters are very angular. There is atmospheric lighting and well-rounded visual effects throughout.

L ucasArts has an odd track record. With a near-equal mix of the sublime and the mediocre, it's hard to gauge what they'll put out next. But when they announced that they were giving Indiana Jones the third-person action/adventure treatment, everyone, still reeling in wonder at the spectacle that was *Jedi Knight*, had good, happy thoughts. And, as is usual when one suffers from happy thoughts, the end results are more than a little disappointing. Where *Tomb Raider* stole *Indy's* archaeological daring-do in the first place, so does this game steal the *Tomb Raider* gameplay in the most blatant manner we've ever seen.

Bringing *Indy* into 1947, the enemies aren't Nazis, but those damn Commies of the Cold War, the Russians. With the Soviets sniffing around the Tower of Babel, and rumblings of some ancient weapon of Biblical proportions gathering momentum, the newly formed CIA calls upon Jones to get the goods. It's not a bad plot, and it unfolds through in-game cinematics throughout the 17 missions (plus one bonus level).

Unfortunately, the game itself is fraught with problems. It apparently uses an upgraded version of the *Jedi Knight* engine, which wasn't

Indy contemplates designers' obsession with lava-filled levels.

Into the drink to scope out the not-so-murky depths.

My, that's a really big set of gears you've got there ...

This is actually the **PCXL** headquarters for world domination.

state of the art back in 1997. But as LucasArts proved on that occasion, graphics aren't everything. Both *Jedi Knight* and even *Outlaws* (the engine for which was staggeringly lacking in visual clout) were fantastically designed and brimming with innovative touches. *Infernal Machine* never comes close to that — the levels are packed with the usual bits of mechanical and action-based puzzles that Lara Croft has solved ad nauseam, and there's virtually nothing new here in the actual gameplay or control.

Indy's got his whip, which is generally useless for attacking, but good for swinging across gaps and climbing. Pistols, rifles, grenades, and bazookas are used on the numerous enemies that exhibit laughably bad AI. Wolves that run away when you shoot them seem almost impressive, especially when compared to the brain-dead reactions of human opponents. The stilted, often unresponsive controls make the gameplay even more frustrating.

Levels span through Russian archaeological digs, temples, volcanoes, and labyrinths. And while the level design is focused on connecting one puzzle to another, the levels are huge and time consuming. And that's really the game's biggest selling point. If you want the long, arduous exploration and environment manipulation that defines this tired genre, it delivers, and has a great lead character in Indy to boot. But really, the voice acting is certainly no Harrison Ford and aside from his trademark fedora and

whip, you could really be controlling any scrubby looking guy.

For anyone hoping for a *Jedi Knight* level of immersion, you won't get it. The graphics are dated, and so is the gameplay and design. If you simply can't get enough *TR*, well, you could get this, or buy *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*. Lara Croft's ass is a damn sight better to stare at for 18 hours.

— JASON D'APRILE likes to whip it ... whip it good!

GRAPHICS
Aging engine = aging visuals. It doesn't even look as good as *Tomb Raider*.

SOUND
Movie music lends a suitably dramatic note, but in-game music is sparse.

DEPTH
Straightforward focus on puzzles and obstacles, with little further depth.

DESIGN
Does exactly what you'd expect, but no more. Strictly by the book, but lengthy and challenging.

RATING 5

➕ Pluses
→ Some nice visual effects
→ Excellent music and, hey, it's indy
→ More *TR*, if you like that stuff

Minuses ➖
→ Unspectacular gameplay
→ Nothing innovative or noteworthy
→ Stilted, frustrating controls

Ultima IX: Ascension

A great game flawed by more bugs than *Starship Troopers*

ACCELE-RATED

The same day this was released to retail, Origin Systems admitted a Direct3D patch was in the works and said the game was "particularly adverse to some cards."
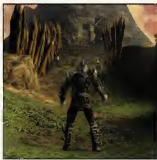
The only thing worse than a bad game is a seemingly awesome one that suffers from technical problems that render it nearly unplayable. Can a game over five years in development — that's close to 2,000 days and Lord (British) knows how many man hours — be released prematurely? It pains me to report this to be true, and it makes for a tough game to review, so here goes nothing ...

For the uninitiated, *Ultima IX: Ascension (UA)* is the ninth (and allegedly final) chapter in the most beloved computer roleplaying game series in history. World-renowned designer Richard "Lord British" Garriott has once again thrust the Earth-bound protagonist (known as the Avatar) into the faraway world of Britannia to save it from the wrath of The Guardian. This evil force is destroying the peaceful land by summoning giant columns to emerge from the land's crust. As with past incarnations of *Ultima* games you must first decide what kind of hero you will be by answering a number of questions from the Ultima Code of Virtues, and so the adventure begins once Lord British asks thee to investigate one of these mysterious columns. Naturally, there are many, many subquests to accept along the way, ranging from recovering a precious object to restoring peace between warring races.

With a hearty combination of action, adventure, and puzzle solving, you must learn a number of fighting skills and dozens of spells to combat the varied creatures. Hacking and slashing take place in both huge, sprawling outdoor levels as well as buildings and subterranean labyrinths. The game is played from a third-person perspective and for the most part it works, despite a few odd camera angles and random control difficulties which take some time getting used to.

To Garriott's credit, the world of *UA* is beautifully realized, with some of the most extraordinarily detailed graphics and atmosphere ever found in an RPG. But alas, it comes with a monstrously hefty price. The game was reviewed on two systems; the better one a PIII 500MHz with 192MB RAM. Three video cards were also used between the two machines: A 32MB Matrox G400, a 16MB Voodoo3 3500TV, and a 32MB Creative Labs 3D Blaster RIVA TNT2 Ultra. Framerates for both systems and all video card setups were

Don't worry, *Ultima Ascension* has not turned into *Ultima Raider*. The emphasis is not on quick reflexes, as previously believed.

With graphics this stunning, what does it matter if you can't get the game to work? Still makes a great slide show.

Hey big mouth! Haven't you ever heard of Certs?

agonizingly slow. This held true even when the visuals were scaled down from 1600x1200 at 32-bit color to 800x600 at 16-bit color ... and that's after accepting the 1.2GB full install. Evidently DirectX7 screwed *UA* to the point that a Glide-based Voodoo3 is needed — nothing else will give anything close to playable framerates. Needless to say, memories of the *Ultima Online* launch poured into my head ...

Unfortunately, video card-based speed issues are not the only problems. *UA* is so chock full of bugs I compiled a list nearly two pages long (no exaggeration) of both reoccurring and isolated oddities that hurt the gameplay experience. Without delving into too much detail, the bugs include frequent freezes and crashes, clipping and sticking on scenery, and a number of random interface inconsistencies (losing the tool belt or objects disappearing from the inventory, etc.). Other peculiar happenings include getting kicked out to the desktop when loading

saved games, seeing the wrong animations for some weapons (e.g., trying to hack and slash with a bow and arrow?!), residents of Britannia who repeat the same past dialogue — even when asked different questions — and creatures that just stand there when attacked. Patches that address some of these problems are already available, with more no doubt on the way, but that's poor consolation for anyone who's doggedly tried to get the best out of this release disaster.

When you consider how ambitious this game is — with over 5,000 objects to manipulate, hundreds of interactive characters, over 18 hours of dialogue, an orchestrated soundtrack and jaw-dropping graphics — it's hard not to be incredibly disappointed with the end result. The bottom line: Whatever *UA*'s potential as one of the most compelling RPGs ever, it doesn't mean diddly-shit when the damn thing won't work. As it stands now, it's an insult to

long-term fans of Britannia to have this junk released as final code. Unless patches fix the majority of issues in a hurry, *Ultima Ascension* should be retitled "Ultimate Dissention."

— **MARC SALTZMAN** *believes way too many games are released before they're ready and wanders how long this "trend" will continue before publishers seem to care about it*

GRAPHICS
If you ever closed your eyes while playing older *Ultima* games and imagined how Britannia looked, this is it.

SOUND
The music, sound effects, and voice-over talent are all top-notch. Still doesn't make up for this wretched thing.

DEPTH
Ultima Ascension is a deep and immersive RPG like no other. But bugs at a deep level are still bugs.

DESIGN
The open-ended structure of the game adds to its replayability. It does not deviate much from the past *Ultimos* in gameplay.

RATING (4)

➕ Pluses
→ Beautiful graphics in a huge world
→ Remains true to the *Ultima* universe
→ Excellent 3D music

Minuses ➖
→ Disgraceful number of bugs
→ Choppy framerates
→ Steep learning curve

Sometimes the enemies just stand there and let you hack away at them. Fun, but hardly challenging.

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a space combat action game

we are told that space

is the final frontier

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beyond...

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EVENTUALLY, EVEN THE ELITE FIND THEIR MATCH
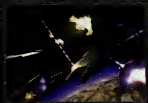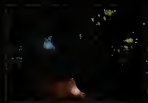
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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

WINDOWS®
95/98 | CD-ROM

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SOUTHPEAK
INTERACTIVE

Interstate '82

DEVELOPER →	Activision
PUBLISHER →	Activision
REQUIRED →	P233, 32MB RAM, 450MB hard drive, D3D accelerator required, DX7 or higher.
IDEAL →	PII 300, 64MB RAM

Who told these guys they had the Hot Wheels license?

ACCELE-RATED

I-82 gets plenty of reflective mileage out of its all-3D engine, but jagged, angular edges dominate. Switching to 32-bit color (a TNT2 instead of Voodoo3) helps substantially.

The new car configuration interface is a breeze.

Don't you hate people who know the best short cuts?

This is about as much booty as you're gonna see in this game.

You can sum up *Interstate '82* by looking at how the game treats one of its two heroes from *Interstate '76*. Groove Champion goes from being a bad-ass, machine gun slingin' vigilante to a whiney-ass, bitch-slapped feather brain.

Members of the development team have gone on record saying "Activision research showed that what people liked best about *I-76* was auto combat." Evidently the same research showed players hated the simulation aspects and general depth, too.

Granted, there are still a wide variety of weapons and possible load outs (though four machine guns in the original have been reduced to a "mainstream" light and heavy option for this version), but there is no longer a distinctive "feel" to these vehicles as cars or combat mounts. They drive the same, they fight the same — which makes solo or multiplayer combat something of a bore. What's worse, while the autos in *I-76* were hard and gritty tools in a battle for survival, *I-82* dishes up an over-saturated rainbow of Hot Wheels-inspired skins that might be intimidating to a three-year-old.

Mission objectives tend to be one-dimensional and usually saddle you with only a single approved way of meeting these objectives. Many missions will require the destruction of some public work, so while it's cost efficient to mount several MGs for car battles, including a missile kit for blowing up bridges is wise.

The new Manta sure looks purty.

I-82's plot and character development brings no relief from the anguish. *I-76*'s hard-edged funk soundtrack and sensibility introduced Groove and Taurus as cool muthas who got a tough job done. Segue six game years and a lot has changed. The now 'fro-less Taurus is in retirement, and the narrative attention has been focused on Groove, who is under attack. Maybe he's missing, maybe he's been captured. Younger sis' Skye Champion calls in a reluctant Taurus to help find him. What follows is a tongue-in-cheek government conspiracy storyline packed with punk trigger men and too few sultry babes.

To its credit, *I-82* does deliver some virtues. With the exception of the cartoonish Las Vegas and the Desert Mall early in the game, later levels such as Area 49 are involving, with exhilarating speed runs through desert canyons and flood channels. And let's face it, even by 1997 standards, the environments in *I-76* were never pretty in software or in 3D. Where exterior roads and scenery are concerned, what *I-82* gets from the Darkside engine (shared with *Heavy Gear II*) is a lot easier on the eyes than the old *MechWarrior 2* war-horse available to *I-76*. The new drag and drop configuration interface is also much more accessible.

If you never played *I-76*, *I-82* is an acceptable diversion. But if you were really into *I-76*, this mediocre sequel will make the original look even better.

— GEORGE T. CHRONIS *was born in L.A. and is no stranger to auto violence and early '80s style*

GRAPHICS
Good, not outstanding exteriors; pretty if unrealistic vehicle models.

SOUND
Voice-over volume is often annoyingly lower than effects and music.

DEPTH
Activision really laid off the gas pedal in this excursion.

DESIGN
Many levels are inspired, but this goodness is severely muted by poor design decisions.

RATING (5)

➕ Pluses
→ Solo player vehicle trade-ins
→ Excellent configuration interface
→ Easy multiplayer support via WON

➖ Minuses
→ No grit, not enough tit
→ Less vehicle individuality/strategy
→ Your mom will approve

PC ACCELERATOR • February 2000 • Al Unser Jr. has earned more prize money than any other racer — well over $20 million

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DEVELOPER ─▷	Sierra Studios
PUBLISHER ─▷	Sierra Studios
REQUIRED ─▷	P233, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM, 4MB video card, Win98
IDEAL ─▷	P2-300, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM, 16MB 3D card

SWAT 3:
Close Quarters Battle

Hey, third time's the charm!

ACCELE-RATED

SWAT3: Close Quarters Battle does not require a 3D accelerator . The game runs both smoothly and beautifully on virtually any TNT or Voodoo board.


Mexican dinner in a can — Result: Submission!

Yeah! You get 'em boys!

R emember the original *SWAT*? If you don't, be glad. The only thing worse than *SWAT* was its misbegotten RTS sequel, *SWAT2*. So bad were the memories of these horrible gaming errors, I nearly popped a log when *SWAT3* landed on my desk. Two shots of whiskey and one install later, I discovered a game that grabbed me by the man parts and made me not just forget — but also forgive — the previous two travesties.

There's something satisfying about following your gun-toting SWAT team on a terrorist hunt into a suburban home, a dance club, or bank, decked out with all the details you'd expect in real life. Such is the realism. Several times I shot at my reflection in a mirror (though mirrors or windows don't shatter). When the SWAT members switch guns, you see them put one gun to their side and take out the other; throw a gas canister and unprotected characters hold their face and cough. The attention to detail keeps your eyes whipping around the screen.

Deathmatch this is not — your goal is to save the lives of hostages, suspects, and of course, your team. Flash-bangs, C2 gas canisters, and non-lethal rounds are at your disposal to help you force people to respect your "author-tay" without having to bring in the meat wagon. The more you yell at someone (using a
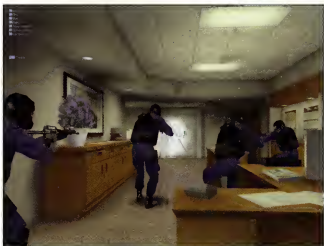
When U.S. Dollars go bad, we bring 'em in the hard way.

"compliance" button which issues a context-sensitive verbal warning), fire at them, or force gas down their windpipes, the higher their "stress level." When they reach day-trader stress levels they make like France and get down on their knees.

True pressure is facing off with a heavily armed suspect who hasn't yet pointed his weapon at you — you force him to surrender by yelling, throwing gas canisters, and shooting around him. Homicidal SWAT commanders are penalized by getting their leadership rating reduced, which makes your team of four (split into two teams of two) less responsive to your orders. A team that doesn't follow orders is a dead team.

Fortunately, unlike *Rogue Spear* where your teammates are stupid-as-dirt robots, in *SWAT3* they are your eyes and hands. Most missions are spent ordering one team to cover as while the other "breach and clear" a room of suspects. The AI on these guys is nothing short of unbelievable. While the mission objectives are pretty generic, the detailed action, AI, and overall intensity make *SWAT3* a gripping experience.

Hold up, now ... where's the multiplayer? Though the expansion pack that adds it should hit shelves next year, it's a *Tiberian*

Sun-grade disappointment to find it missing. It's a good thing this package packs enough heat to keep you hot 'til then.

— **MATT HOLMES** *has nose grease all over his manitor*

GRAPHICS
Top-notch engine works wonders to draw you right into the action.

SOUND
Team members constantly report to you, gunfire is perfect, and dialog fits the scene.

DEPTH
Single player is all you get — and it's plenty. No multiplayer makes Baby Jesus cry.

DESIGN
The LAPD SWAT team consulted on this game. It shows.

RATING 9

⊕ Pluses
→ Finally, AI that doesn't make us punch the monitor
→ Lots of real world locations
→ Sexy "suspect" in towel

⊖ Minuses
→ No multiplayer WTF?
→ A mere four primary weapons does not an arsenal make
→ Some missions painfully difficult

DEVELOPER →	Atomic Games
PUBLISHER →	SSI
REQUIRED →	P200, 32MB RAM, 6oMB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM
IDEAL →	PII 300, 64MB RAM, 100MB hard drive

Close Combat:
Battle of the Bulge

The "Little Wargame That Could" just keeps on getting it done

ACCELE-RATED

As is usually the case, the editors of PCXL do not feel that I can be trusted with a 3D game, so you don't have to worry your pretty little head over a 3D rating here.

OVERCAST

Microsoft can't be bothered to publish the *Close Combat* series anymore. Never mind that it's the best tactical wargame on the market. Forget that it's the closest you can get to a *Saving Private Ryan* sim on computer, or that critics have been worshipping this series since its debut. The bottom line of fiscal reality is that games aren't allowed to break even. So it was with no fanfare that SSI, brave holders of the wargame banner, took over the license from Atomic Games and gave *Close Combat* a home.

Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge improves this realtime strategy series in a few wonderful ways. It's really the setting that tests the gameplay's appeal, since the Ardennes offensive of 1944-45 has been adapted for the PC as many times as the French have surrendered to real-world invaders. Goddamn French and their Arc de Capitulation!

The main adjustment has been the integration of a grand strategic factor to the tactical-scale campaign. Battle groups can be ordered around on a strategic map of the Ardennes pocket. Depending on how you maneuver your forces, and whether you choose to play as Allies or Fritz, your initial deploy-

Wargame or ski resort?

Icy roads can be hell, no?

C'mon, man, a broom factory can't be worth fighting over.

ment points will shift from map to map. The starting points available to you in the next mission are dependent on how you finished the previous battle. If you won key victory locations, you'll have better options for deployment on the next map. It adds a huge level of depth.

The total number of missions depends on campaign branching, and since there are four campaigns with about 10 to 12 missions each, there are better than 40 missions in all. This is also the first title in the series that really addresses the effect of weather on a battle. And it's about time, too — since the Battle of the Bulge was a nightmare of snow, ice, mud, and frost. The effectiveness of air power is diluted by snowfall, and you can forget about indirect artillery support. Since the weather impinges upon direct line-of-sight, this is a critical issue.

Smaller adjustments make the firefights even deadlier. It's easier for lone bazooka men to take out tanks, which makes a great case for sitting those bad boys down in ditches and waiting for the Panzers to roll on you. This is frustrating if you're leading with armor, but that's what the real campaign was like. Attacking forces are required to send in infantry to clear every last ambusher. It's made even worse by authentic sound effects, panicked voices, and screams.

This game is great, and will appeal to both hardcore grognards and realtime buffs. Microsoft dropped it like a live grenade, but you should scoop it up. ➤

— DANIEL MORRIS *is quite sure he would not fall on a grenade to save a fellow freelance writer*

GRAPHICS
It's hard to call a systematic depiction of carnage "pretty," but it really is.

SOUND
Eerie war effects, chattering guns, screaming krauts — it's all here.

DEPTH
Victories dovetail into subsequent missions and create amazing depth.

DESIGN
The most exciting and authentic tactical wargame out there.

RATING 9

➕ Pluses
→ Manageable strategic elements
→ Addictive tactical-scale battles
→ New weather modeling adds greatly to realism

➖ Minuses
→ Some battles can be slow
→ Casual gamers may get frustrated by the in-fighting
→ It's possible for Fritz to win

A P51 Mustang strafes a Nazi Infantry unit. Way to go, fly-boys!

DEVELOPER ---> Quantic Dream	
PUBLISHER ---> Eidos Interactive	
REQUIRED ---> PII 233, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard drive, 8X CD-ROM, 4MB SVGA video card	
IDEAL ---> PII 300, 64MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive, 8MB video card	

Omikron: The Nomad Soul

A vast world is yours to explore, just don't look too closely

Omikron definitely gets points for ingenuity. With an engaging storyline, a cross-genre playing style (is it a fighter? Is it a shooter? Is it turn-based strategy?), and a David Bowie-scored soundtrack, it certainly ain't your average point-and-click adventure game. Most of the time, playing *Omikron* feels like watching WWF — you know it's fixed, but you're still intrigued by the unfolding spectacle.

The game begins with an other-dimensional dude, Kay'l, standing square in your computer screen. He tells you that he's bridged a gap between his world and yours via your PC (not a local-area network, we suppose). All you have to do is agree, and your soul takes over his body and enters his world in an attempt to save it from certain destruction (or at least a serious beating). It's a little cheesy, but a novel method of (quite literally) drawing you into the character and setting.

Of course, once you've entered *Omikron*, you have no idea what's going on. It's time to explore your new environment, interact with friendlies and not-so-friendlies, and follow Kay'l's tracks to find out what's happened to him and his partner, Den. Over the course of this epic quest you'll inhabit not just Kay'l, but over 40 different characters, each with their own unique abilities allowing you to achieve certain objectives that another body couldn't accomplish.

It sounds great, and on the surface, it looks great too. *Omikron* is vast, but easy to navigate ("sliders" — free taxis will take you anywhere you need to go at the touch of a button). You can enter buildings and explore the city freely, chatting to numerous folks milling about. In addition to the eerie Bowie soundtrack, the sound effects and ambiance — porn vendors hawking their wares over loudspeakers and other appropriate city noise pollution — add real character to the world.

Unfortunately, once the surface of this open, original bubble is breached, it often deflates in disappointing fashion. The world of *Omikron* is like the wild west towns that Bugs Bunny would set up to fool Yosemite Sam — they look great from the front, but if you check behind them, you'll find nothing but slats holding up the illusion. Only the buildings with direct relevance to the storyline have any real substance, and while you can talk to random characters, most of the time all you get

You'd think that if you were a bad-ass in a futuristic city where you can shoot punks, go to strip joints, and get laid by polygonal Neve Campbell lookalikes, you wouldn't look so bored in the sack.

DAVID BOWIE 4II

Seedy bars without ugly drunk skags, cops that don't harass you, and strippers that don't get completely nekkid — we're not in San Francisco anymore, Toto.

Long before Madonna, Boy George, and Marilyn Manson, there was David Bowie... born David Jones, to an unwed couple living in a dirt-poor neighborhood of London in 1947.

Shortly before dropping out of high school, David was injured in a street fight, rendering his now-famous left eye peculiarly dilated. In the late '60s, David played in several R & B bands, then (for obvious reasons to anyone familiar with The Monkees) changed his last name to Bowie. In 1969, Mercury Records released "Space Oddity," which would come to be one of Bowie's greatest hits. The anthem was played on the BBC coverage of the first moon landing.
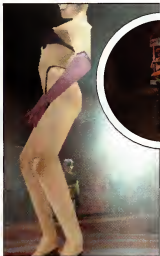
Over the next 10 years he would rocket to superstardom, with such groundbreaking albums as *Aladdin Sane* and *Hunky*, forever changing entertainment history by blurring the lines of his many personas, including his infamous turn as Ziggy Stardust.

In the '80s, after a stint in rehab and a divorce, Bowie reinvented himself yet again, with numerous successful albums, and appearing in *The Elephant Man* on Broadway, as well as on filmside.

Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*. Probably his most remarkable achievement this decade (at least to you horny bastards) was marrying hot Somali model Iman in 1992.

Bowie's collaborators have included John Lennon (co-writer of signature hit "Fame"), Queen, and Mick Jagger. Considering that this über-pop cultural phenomenon's career has always been based on pushing the boundaries of art, entertainment, and (gasp) sexuality, it's no surprise that he would be the first major celeb to take an active part in producing and promoting a computer game.

is a curt "I'm busy" or a "Go away, kid, you botta me."

Most of the time, you'll wander about in third-person (although you can shift to first-person to look around through Kay'l's eyes). Occasionally you can play a shooter or a side-view fighting game, both of which can be practiced safely before getting your hands dirty in the real world.

At first, these combat aspects of the game seem a bit hokey. The side-view unarmed combat is no *Mortal Kombat* or *Virtua Fighter*, and the shooter mode can't hold a railgun to *Quake*. But for this game's mood and setting, they fit in tightly into the adventure, kicking up the revs sufficiently without detracting from the greater mystery solving. Just when you're getting to the point where conversation and exploration are getting you nowhere, the game allows you to take matters into your own hands — or your own guns.

Omikron uses a unique approach to inventory and game saves. While most adventure games allow you to either lug around more items than Ivana Trump on a shopping spree or limit you to only a select few, *Omikron* lets you carry 18 in your SNEAK (a molecular disassembly storage and information device — nice!) and store others in a multi-plan locker. And, once you've performed a mundane action, such as showing your badge at Security Headquarters or using your apartment key, the game automatically handles it for you from then on.

Preset save spots (denoted by three spinning rings) can be incredibly frustrating, but the simple locations (Kay'l's office, apartment, etc.) make this more acceptable. Additionally, magic rings can be used to "purchase" tips when you get stuck — a very welcome feature in an occasionally quite directionless game.

Omikron disguises its linear path in an illusion of openness, which is often more frustrating than appealing. Certainly, the varying styles of gameplay, enjoyable storyline, and innovative interface keep it from being a pile of "Omikrap." Its depth and continual twists keep the pace flowing through the numerous different bodies, adding a compelling edge to a long, well-written story.

—JOEL STRAUCH *once thought he projected his soul into a game*

GRAPHICS

At night, *Omikron* was sometimes hard to see, but vehicles and buildings looked fine in the right lighting.

SOUND

The Bowie soundtrack adds a lot to the game's ambiance. The score changes during combat scenes, for example, really getting the blood pumping.

DEPTH

While *Omikron* appears un-shallow at first glance, a lot of the world is only skin deep.

DESIGN

The interface, SNEAK, and sliders are all well designed, making this world easy to explore.

RATING (7)

➕ Pluses

→ Excellent music and sound effects
→ Innovative interface
→ Vast world to explore

➖ Minuses

→ Preset save spots
→ Stuck on game's rails
→ Empty world below the surface

David Bowie: Cross-dresser. *Omikron*: Cross-genre.

DEVELOPER →	Gearbox Studios
PUBLISHER →	Sierra
REQUIRED →	P133, 24MB RAM, 400MB hard drive, full version of Half-Life
IDEAL →	PII 400, 128MB RAM, 660MB hard drive, Voodoo3

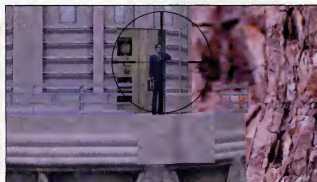# Half-Life: Opposing Force

When more of the same is just what we want

ACCELE-RATED

Voodoo3 lets the Glide-specific code go to town, but D3D support is fine for TNT2 and G400 owners. There was a glitch using a G400 (on an Athlon-based system), corrupting the screen after quitting out to save and then trying to return. Once restarted, everything worked fine.
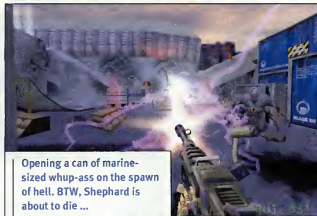
Having played Half-Life to death, Gearbox's add-on for the universally acclaimed Game Of The Year could be a pale imitator, or to coin a great English phrase, the dog's bollocks. It is, as that saying follows, the nuts — the badger's nadgers, if you will.

The fledgling developer, formed from the ruins of Rebel Boat Rocker, whose EA-signed Prox Wor/ Point Mon was canned, has acquitted itself admirably at the reins of one of the industry's hottest properties. Opposing Force is just what the majority of Half-Life fans have been jonesin' for — more of the same level and fundamental game design, weapon creativity and variation, and big-ass alien creatures. It also manages to top the ground-breaking AI exhibited by those government marines in the original with the tactically devastating Black Ops.

These guys are fast, effective, well armed, and not afraid to use their array of weaponry on Corporal Adrian Shephard (that'd be you). Running concurrently to the events and battles survived by Gordon Freeman, the game begins with your band of marines flying in to chase down Freeman and secure the Black Mesa facility. You're the lone survivor of the troop transport crashing (a result of alien attack) and now have to get to safety, picking up stragglers from the decimated marine corps.

Along the way, radio messages refer to the aborted hunt for Freeman, with numerous references to the original. Of course, the government agent reprises his shadowy role. Evidently, while Freeman's busy on the alien planet, new aliens were invading Black Mesa. You also learn of the facility's proclivity to alien weapon research, uncovering the Barnacle monster's new use as (essentially) a grappling hook, and an amphibious creature's devastating exploding spit (well, that's what it looks like). Yet another alien weapon kicks out a teleportation ball that presumably zaps its target back to whatever hellhole spawned it.

They're all cool and effective, but the addition of the sniper rifle really changes the complexion of the game. With that in hand, you turn from the perennial hunted into the hunter. In OpForce, rather than wailing in with the heavy duty

machine gun, stealth and trickery are your allies.

Gearbox has done a fantastic job of using a punchy music score to add greater threat and tension. While the early game of this roughly 10-hour expansion mission features many puzzles, ammo restrictions, and level manipulation, the pace ramps up to some cracking confrontations as you and marine pals wail on alien ass.

Sure, I was bummed when it was over so quickly. And many of the tricks and traps are tweaks to the original, but its style, attitude, and feel is the best in the single-player first-person business. The $40 price tag is definitely steep for an add-on, but for the hardcore "Half-Lifer," OpForce is a compelling and welcome return to Black Mesa.

—ROB SMITH thinks this should be the standard minimum for expansion packs (in everything but price)

GRAPHICS
Half-Life again, though the new monsters have more variations in shape and textures and look great.

SOUND
Same solid sound effects, but the effective use of music at key moments is a welcome addition.

DEPTH
It's short, and the story doesn't ever catch fire like Freeman's did, but it's worth chasing through for the battles.

DESIGN
Same level design principles (linear level routes disguised with small off-shoots) work perfectly.

RATING 9

Pluses
→ More Half-Life, unspoiled
→ Great new weapons
→ Better multiplayer solidity

Minuses
→ Some puzzles too Half-Life like
→ Story is lackluster
→ Too expensive for too little

Opening a can of marine-sized whup-ass on the spawn of hell. BTW, Shephard is about to die ...

Another set from the first game — so tempting and so frustratingly impossible to kill.

It's not what
you play

It's what you
play it on

Go to http://pcxl.ign.com/gaming411. Product number

Do it alone, it's weird. Do it with others, it's a club.

Yahoo! Clubs

DO YOU YAHOO!

DEVELOPER ---> Exios	
PUBLISHER ---> Hothouse Creations	
REQUIRED ---> P166, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive, 2MB video card, 8X CD-ROM	
IDEAL ---> PII 266, 64MB RAM, 510MB hard drive, 4MB video card, 12X CD-ROM	

Abomination:
The Nemesis Project

Smells like team spirit (among other things)

ACCELE-RATED

Just to show that not every game needs a 3D card, *Abomination* has no support. The painted isometric backdrops won't any look better with any card.

Don't rely on the stand-and-defend combat options.

Criminally, there is no character named "Orkin."

Seems there was a games-only party one night, and it got out of hand. Some of our naughty games had too much to drink, hanky-panky ensued, and by the end of the night a child was conceived. We know the mother is *X-COM*, but there is some confusion as to who the father is — maybe it was *Syndicate* (he was hitting the bottle pretty hard), maybe it was *Alien Infestation* (he with the charming-yet-freaky side). The condom was definitely from WizardWorks.

Anyway, *X-COM* and mystery Mr. X had an OK-looking, but retarded, kid. His name is ... *Abomination*.

This game of squad-level combat sports an isometric, detailed-yet-slightly cartoonish look. Seems a plague has whomped America good, leaving her streets crawling with mutated cyborgs, wandering freaks, multi-armed cars, and other disturbing stuff. The sliver of the population that has remained unaffected by this apocalyptic event has

broken into two main camps. The Faithful have fallen in line with the Plague's chaos and are blamed for the whole mess; and then there's everybody else. To help combat the assembled Forces of Weirdness, you control a core group of eight genetically enhanced soldiers who've been decanted from a government bunker to confront the mutant menace. Along the way, you have access to regular-people troops who serve largely as cannon fodder while your commando-types handle the really sticky missions. Your combat teams scour the cities, fighting street to street, rooftop to rooftop, and objective to objective — it's all *X-COM*-ish, but the real-time element and, um, interesting control schemes introduce all kinds of problems.

The typical mission has your team rolling into the danger zone in their insertion vehicle. Controlling your guy's or gal's click-and-send style, you also bring up menus that determine each character's stance (prone, standing) as well as their combat attitude (openly aggressive, return-fire-only). You can also search trash bins, boxes, or curbside mess o' bodies for additional weapons, ammo, or what have you. Most missions, while certainly not easy, have a depressing air of sameness to them: Bust in here, shoot everything in sight then, extract Useless Person A from point

B. Nothing is gained by planting somebody prone in cover-fire position; why does my high-powered rifle's range end across the street? These are all little things individually, but like the glorified trash heap that is the **PCXL** office, they pile up over time and result in a garbage dump of messy mediocrity.

There is a subplot here involving yet another group of worrisome foes that are a lot scarier than your average evil foot soldier, but the nice touches come too late, and they're too few and far between. At least multiplay for eight players can be fun for a while because all players are laboring under the same control and game-design difficulties ... but the gaming-apple has fallen just too far from the *X-COM* tree here to convert any turn-based fans. One guess what it fell into.

—CHRIS HUDAK *reminds readers: If it has tentacles and it's not inside a Japanese restaurant, leave it the hell alone*

GRAPHICS
Bright and detailed, in a slightly-behind-the-times kinda way. Actually, very befitting an *X-COM* clone.

SOUND
Suitably industrial soundtrack; otherwise, nothing to sample home about.

DEPTH
Attempts at depth, but most missions are "move in, roast everything."

DESIGN
Admirable elements stuck together with something like, say, dog doo.

RATING (4)

➕ Pluses
→ Corpse-littered streets
→ Realtime/*X-COM*-style fusion
→ Outfitting characters pre- battle

Minuses ➖
→ Poor interface/control
→ Totally out-of-scale weapon effects
→ Poor AI

I know the whole street looks bad — but don't stand next to the car, trust me.

DEVELOPER → Sierra Studios	
PUBLISHER → Sierra	
REQUIRED → P166, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 250MB HD	
IDEAL → PII 400, 128MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM, 3D-accelerator card, 3D sound card, 3Deep, girlish tendancies	

Gabriel Knight III

Aristocratic French vampires are a royal pain in the neck

ACCELE-RATED

Supports D3D. The software mode looks good if your system is fast. The graphics are 3Deep-optimized, too. Low-end systems may chug, so turn off detail and lower resolution if the game gets too slow.
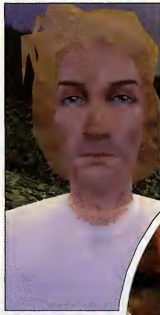
L et's make this clear from the start: Adventure games are not "chick games." All the other **PCXL** editors *razz* me because I've been primed to play *Gabriel Knight III* all year long, zoning out while I describe the touching "platonic romance" between Gabriel and Grace in *GKII*. Oh, crap ... maybe it is a chick game after all. Well, regardless of your gender, there's a lot to like about this latest occult mystery starring blond pretty boy (and Mike Salmon look-alike) Gabriel Knight, even if it's not quite the best in the series.

Once again, designer/writer Jane Jensen has really out-

done herself, creating a meticulously researched and well-crafted storyline tying together a child's kidnapping, vampires, the Holy Grail, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and Gabriel's ancestry into one epic plot. This is as close to literature as a PC game (or gamer for that matter) will ever get. *GKIII* begins when Gabriel and longtime assistant Grace are invited to the home of Prince James on what they think is a social visit — only to end up protecting James' infant son from "night visitors." (The prologue appears only in a graphic novel on the CD.) Of course, the kid is snatched, resulting in Gabe tracking the evil kidnappers to the quaint little French village of Rennes-le-Chateau.

Once there, he discovers that a tour group, including his old New Orleans cop buddy Detective Mosely, has arrived to search for a mysterious treasure, which may or may not be the Holy Grail. (Incidentally, both the town and treasure legend are real — Jensen weaves real-world locations, history, and religion into a convoluted, yet plausible, mythological soap opera. This could be the only game you'll ever play that lists sources and recommended reading material in the game manual.) "Last Temptation of Christ" picketers watch out: If the thought of our Savior doing the horizontal mambo and producing offspring offends you, steer clear because Jensen isn't afraid to take thematic gambles.

Graphically, *GKIII* looks completely different from its predecessors, bringing the characters into a rich 3D environment and giving the player a moveable camera. Unfortunately, it's as if the move to 3D was an afterthought — the game design is still very much 2D. There isn't a single puzzle that couldn't have been done using the old 2D engine (in fact, sometimes it helps to think in 2D when solving a few of them). Click and point

Gabriel faces down horned psychos, but we'd rather get a closer look at that rip in Grace's jeans.
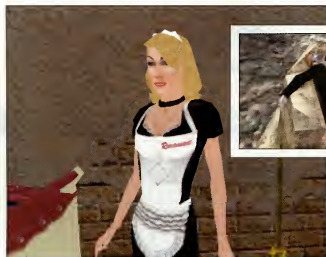
Here at PCXL, we've decided that every game should have a French maid. (Center) Hey, looks like OJ's on a vacation!
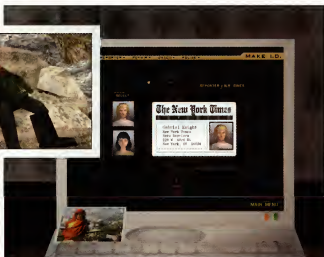
Get used to this screen. SYDNEY, the Schattenjager database, will help you solve many of the puzzles.

all the way, the multi-icon interface hasn't changed much since *GKII*. Too bad the camera's not mobile enough to let you see up and down instead of choosing a "look" icon to get a better view. Oddly, inventory items don't rotate in 3D like they did in *GKII*. Can someone explain this to me?

The characters are at the same time stiff, yet constantly in motion, like animatronic mannequins mimicking life by perpetually bobbing and weaving, but never fooling you into thinking they're real. For that reason, and because of the decision to use the in-game engine for cut-scenes, *GKIII* just isn't that scary. At one point you discover two dead bodies. The cut-scene begins, ominous music blares as onlookers gasp in terror — you know something ghastly is coming

— but the polygonal corpses instantly remind you that it's all just a game. Cut-scenes in *GKI* and *GKII* were used for dramatic effect, incorporating graphic novel images or on-location FMV to elevate horror and suspense when the 2D engine couldn't sufficiently do the job. Watching the completely unterrifying *GKIII* 3D engine do the same is like watching an all-hand puppet production of Dracula.

And speaking of Dracula, for a game about the undead, *GKIII* is surprisingly vampire-light. Considering the depth of the story, that's forgivable, but the bad guys don't show up in a major way until the finale, leaving the bulk of the story heavy on conversation and short on action. The game is broken up into time chunks, progressing to the next once certain requirements

are satisfied. Like *GKII*, gameplay is alternated between Gabe and Grace, with Gabe looking for the baby and Grace attempting to solve the Rennes-le-Chateau mystery. As always, interaction between characters is handled via dialogue trees. The format works well, I just wish the pacing were snappier and that the vampires didn't keep to the shadows so much. *GKIII* is a stand-alone game, but *GK* fans will be delighted with references to Gabe's past mysteries and the series' running gag of playing "When The Saints Go Marching In" at the local bar.

Most of the puzzles make sense, though solutions aren't always readily apparent. Luckily, an in-game hint system helps get you through the toughest ones. The voice acting is excellent and

the cast includes "Star Trek" actors Rene Auberjonois and John de Lancie, but, ham-for-ham, they can't match the Shatner-esque extravagance of Tim Curry's encore performance as Gabriel.

So, what about Gabe and Grace's "platonic romance"? I'm sworn to secrecy, but the cliffhanger ending almost guarantees a *GKIV*, which is definitely good news for all us "girl game" lovers. ▶

—CHUCK OSBORN *isn't a bloody hint line, so don't don't even think about e-mailing him for help*

KNIGHT OR NOT

Though he won't admit it, PCXL Editor-in-Chief Mike Salmon (with groovy blond highlights) sports an uncanny resemblance to Gabriel Knight. In fact, we wonder if he might be the inspiration. Let's run down the similarities:

GABRIEL
- Named after an archangel
- Has a Schattenjager talisman
- Treats assistant Grace like mud
- Writes mystery novels
- Is a blond
- Deathly afraid of commitment

MIKE
- Eats at "the golden arches"
- Does too many Jager shots
- Hopes to see Gia wrestle in mud
- Novel writing style a mystery
- Acts like a blond
- Wears a flesh-colored wedding ring

Quit sticking out your chest, geek! Don't you hate tourists?

GRAPHICS

Uniformly good, but it's not exactly *Unreal*, either.

SOUND

A beautiful score compliments superb voice acting ... and Tim Curry's overdone Cajun caricature.

DEPTH

Wow ... it's so ... wow. You'll want to play it again just to see what you missed the first time.

DESIGN

A 2D game in a 3D world, the first half could use some more action.

RATING 8

✚ Pluses
→ A brilliant and detailed story
→ Fantastic music and sound
→ Leaves you wanting more

Minuses ⊖
→ Not scary enough
→ Vampire-light
→ Doesn't fully use 3D environments

DEVELOPER → Infogrames
PUBLISHER → Infogrames
REQUIRED → P233, 32MB RAM, 120MB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM, Direct 3D card
IDEAL → PIII 450, 128MB RAM, 225MB hard drive

Slave Zero

Because all I really wanna do is blow stuff up ...

ACCELE-RATED

Explosions and busy environments are the trademarks of this engine, but textures and details seem soft in Glide. Environment mapping on a G400 looks great.

Ah, the joys of straight up, no-nonsense, balls to the wall action. Infogrames brings it back with *Slave Zero*, an unabashedly action-focused third-person shooter set in an extremely cool, dark, future city. You won't find too much in the way of deep, meaningful gameplay, but *Slave Zero* does sport some great environments, an engaging story, and pure, unadulterated action.

Taking the role of the 60-foot tall biomechanical warrior, Slave Zero, you fight through a huge industrial war zone to defeat a maniacal dictator who rules with an iron fist. The game does a good job of setting you within a living city by having the roadways bustling with civilian traffic and pedestrians, while you trade rockets and plasma with an army of giant robots, bombers, attack choppers, tanks, ground troops, and other nasties. You can smash smaller buildings by jumping on them, or use cars, girders, or people to use as makeshift, short-lived weapons.

Slave Zero sports mission-based levels that assign you specific objectives like destroying power plants, escorting convoys, and protecting your home base, but it all amounts to simply running about, blowing shit to smithereens. Consequently, if you aren't into mindless action, the game gets rather repetitive over the course of the 15 missions. This problem is further exacerbated by

I'm baaaaad slave, and you're goooood slave!

Don't ever flush spiders down the toilet.

Looks like Slave Zero moonlights as a stand-up comedian.

This is not wanton destruction. We call it "proper urban renewal."

the very linear nature of the levels. Most of the levels are commendably large, however, and the action level is nearly constant.

Graphically, the game is decent if not outstanding, and there seems to have been a tradeoff between visual detail and crowded fighting zones. Textures aren't as detailed as they could have been (unless you use a G400) and the framerate often sinks, but the environments are filled with activity. Character animation is nicely done, and the design of the robots gives them an excellent ominous and sporty look. Sound effects are top-notch, and the tunes are generally better than average gaming tracks.

Taken at face value, *Slave Zero* is a very well done single-player action game, but therein lies the problem that a lot of gamers are going to find substantial. *Slave Zero* has no multiplayer mode whatsoever, and that's a shame, since these active urban environments would have been terrific to stomp through in a deathmatch or CTF game. This seems a very odd omission and suggests the game was rushed to market.

While the lack of multiplayer is a pretty big oversight, *Slave Zero's* fast-paced, frenetic action is engaging, and the environments have a distinctly cool, cyberpunk appeal. The level design is linear but entertaining, the story is interesting, and control is excellent. It's not deep or innovative, but for a good time all by yourself, *Slave Zero* delivers.

— **JASON D'APRILE** *is somewhat of on expert on "hoving o good time by himself"*

GRAPHICS
Lots of explosions, but not as good looking as other current 3D engines.

SOUND
Excellent sound effects and surprisingly good electronica tunes.

DEPTH
See bad thing, destroy bad thing. And that's all the depth I need, dammit!

DESIGN
Linear, but a fast-paced and action-filled game.

RATING

+ Pluses
→ Great sci-fi urban environments, cool characters
→ Very well-done sound and tunes
→ Action-packed gameplay

− Minuses
→ Good Lord, no multiplayer!
→ Graphics are slightly sub-par
→ Not extremely long, and with no multi, once you beat it, that's it

Age of Wonders

DEVELOPER -->	Epic Games
PUBLISHER -->	Gathering of Developers
REQUIRED -->	P666, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard drive, 4X CD-ROM
IDEAL -->	PII 200, 64MB RAM

Heroes of Might and Magic and Wonder

ACCELE-RATED

The game relies on 16-bit SVGA graphics, so visually it is anything but obvious. However you have to cut isometric strategy games some slack. Although we aren't quite sure why. You just have to.

AGE OF WONDER BRA

In this day and age it takes more than a cute smile to make it big.

NAME -->
Eva Herzigova
FAMOUS -->
For appearing in her underwear all of the time
WONDER BRA POWERS --> She is the wonderbra poster girl – and it's one poster we certainly don't mind hanging up

<-- **NAME**
Jennifer Love "ly"
<-- **FAMOUS**
For developing very quickly and wonderfully
<-- **WONDER BRA POWERS**
Fluctuating boob size has us confused and magically glued to anything she does

If someone was keeping track of batting averages for PC game genres, the one batting .1000 is, surprisingly, fantasy turn-based strategy. Unlikely as it may seem, there hasn't been a really bad turn-based fantasy wargame in ages.

That streak won't be broken today. Not only does *Age of Wonders* provide all the stuff that keeps fans of this genre addicted, it also features a number of new ideas that have yet to be explored. The most impressive is spell research and terrain application of magic. Forget about *Heroes of Might & Magic's* girly fairie-dust effects. In this game, you'll level mountains, gouge giant rifts into the ground, and set castles ablaze.

There are seven different "spheres" of magic centered around different effects. You can choose to invest each spellcaster with access to only one sphere (in which case they become gods within that arena of magic) or let them access all spheres (for versatility but lesser power). The strategic combinations and configurations of magic use on the battlefield are truly an accomplishment.

Little bitty people take turns casting spells, if you're into that.

Unit art and terrain graphics are strong and more ballsy than *HOMM* while retaining many similarities. There are nubile nymphs who can rush at enemy units and sway the enemies with their charms and other cheeky touches that make for eye-opening encounters. You won't find that in most fantasy wargames.

If you aren't tactically inclined, the game can be played in a "hands-off" grand strategy mode that limits your input to maneuver, research, and diplomacy. But the real fun (as with *HOMM*) is in the tactical battles. When two army groups meet, the focus shifts to a close-in mode where the homeboys throw down. I was surprised at how tactically sound these fights were. Control of advantageous terrain makes a big difference in the outcome, which is why terrain-affecting magic is so important. Fast-moving units create havoc with lightning-fast flanking attacks, while assaults that come from long range become the nemesis of melee units. The beauty of the

combat system is that it's never more complicated than you want it to be — if meticulous direction of each unit isn't your thing, you can set AI to guide the conflict or just let the computer auto-play.

Fans of the *HOMM* series are going to find lots to appreciate in *Age of Wonders*, and just about anyone will get a big kick out of this most accessible wargame.

— **DANIEL MORRIS** *kicks spells like an O.G.*

GRAPHICS
Clean, crisp SVGA graphics in an attractive isometric game map.

SOUND
Lots of screaming, chanting, and general fantasy fun in a subtly effective audio track.

DEPTH
Tons of options, units, and effects, particularly with magic.

DESIGN
Owes a lot to *Heroes of Might & Magic*, but adds a lot to the fantasy strategy genre.

RATING 8

➕ Pluses
--> Deep and exciting magic system
--> Creative fantasy-setting units
--> Customizable complexity in battles

Minuses ➖
--> Derivative design
--> Manual is less than informative
--> "Wonders" is a weak word

Umm, not much wondrous to look at in this game. However it does have plenty of depth.

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DEVELOPER →	Novalogic
PUBLISHER →	Novalogic
REQUIRED →	P233, 64MB RAM, 6X CD-ROM, 400MB hard drive
IDEAL →	PII 300, 96MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive

Armored Fist 3

Cool technology ... wish there was a game to go with it

ACCELE-RATED

This game ran fairly smoothly on a Riva TNT, 96MB RAM, on a PII 300. There were a few stutters with all details turned on and lots of enemies on screen, though.

The enemy soldier crawling over that hill is about to have a really bad day.

Do you hear a whistling sound? Oh, Shi...

A few years back singer Pat Boone released an album called *In a Metal Mood* with covers of famous heavy metal tunes by Judas Priest, Metallica, et al. It went over about as well as you'd think. The thing is, Pat actually has genuine musical talent in that Lawrence Welk, old-ladies-with-blue-hair kind of way. *Armored Fist 3* is the videogame equivalent of *In a Metal Mood*. It's an effort by a hardcore simulation company to "broaden its audience" by releasing a more action-oriented title. It also works about as well as you'd think.

Novalogic, of course, has always meant voxels, and plenty of 'em. *Armored Fist 3* doesn't disappoint, incorporating a state-of-the-art (for voxels) engine that contains all kinds of beautiful eye candy. Tanks leave tread marks, and the exterior surfaces of both your tank and enemy vehicles are amazingly beautiful. If explosions are smaller and less impressive than I'd like them to be, the action is still pretty cool. Indeed, there's a lot of stuff on the virtual battlefield that can be destroyed.

Therein lies the beginning of the game's problems. Throwing tons of enemies is deemed the way to mask atrocious AI. At first, this should be fun. Destroying a single enemy is far easier than it should be, while learning how to switch between different stations on your

tanks and giving orders to your platoons is very easy, too, thanks to a well designed control scheme. What's wrong with this setup? It's too complicated for pure arcade-style play. But when you attempt more complicated maneuvers, it turns out your own troops are as stupid as the enemy. Essentially, battles are decided by who has more troops and the keenest aim.

The best feature of *Armored Fist 3* is its multiplayer, specifically the Voice-Over-Net technology. When I tried it out, I was shocked to find out that it actually worked. But voices come across rather tinny and it can slow down your machine if your connection's not up to snuff. However if you've got the bandwidth, hearing another player's voice is incredibly cool. The multiplayer suite itself is solid, although there was some slowdown when more than six or seven players mixed it up at close range.

Armored Fist 3 has some great action elements, but it's too complicated to succeed as an action game. It's also got a solid simulation game buried in it somewhere, but without enough depth. The two disparate elements just don't work well together. If you want an action game or a sim, there are better examples of both out there. ▶

— ALLEN RAUSCH once encountered an armored fist in a bar

GRAPHICS
Beautiful 32-bit engine using voxels, though explosions are a bit weak.

SOUND
Pretty good; nice bass on explosions.

DEPTH
Excellent mission editor, plenty of campaign-style missions (though the missions are a bit pedestrian).

DESIGN
Is it a hardcore sim? Is it an arcade game? I'm not sure even the designers could tell.

RATING 6

➕ Pluses
→ Free Voice-Over-Net headset
→ Beautiful graphics engine
→ Voice-over-Net actually works

➖ Minuses
→ Crappy AI
→ Lack of design focus
→ Voice-over-Net doesn't work well

TRANSMISSIONS

Once voice transmission becomes common in online games, we'll need new slang and phrases ...

Four-foot footup → Got shot in game because cat walked on keyboard

Going Jason on his ass → Going to hunt down a camper

I'm velcroed → Played *Everquest* for 16 hours, can't get out of chair

He's been Crying Gamed → Hitting on 63-year old chatting himself "Jessica"

He's an Ion Storm, man! → Claims extraordinary skills but can't back it up

Get used to this screen — you'll be seeing it a lot.

M1A2 Abrams weight: 69.54 tons → Four pounds less than Rosie O'Donnell's head

http://www.pcgamer.com

Sim Theme Park

At least you don't have to go through a metal detector to get into this park

ACCELE-RATED

Sim Theme Park is D3D-compatible, so almost any 8MB card or higher will work fine. But, it really slows down when your park is full of rides, so having a fast processor and plenty of RAM is important. A software mode is also available.

Damn! This "Flying Machine" thing has gotten out of hand!

This park is obviously not vegetarian-friendly.

Elaborate wooden rollercoasters are just one of the many types of rides you can make in Sim Theme Park.

For kids, theme parks lose their magic once they discover that the giant, walking Tweety Bird is really some pimply-faced geek who lacks the credentials to work at Chick-Fil-A. Teens and adults know better — it's all about huge, potentially fatal rides that might scare your girlfriend into making out with you. For that reason, the addictive Rollercoaster Tycoon flew off the shelves.

Sim Theme Park attempts to recapture the magic, combining heavy theming with bent physics to produce a sort of Rollercoaster Tycoon Lite — a lightweight sim packed with saccharine-sweetness. Originally called Theme Park World (and still called that in the opening cutscenes), the name change to Sim Theme Park is meant to capitalize on EA-owned Maxis' SimCity series — it's all about branding. Starting in one of four themed islands (two available at startup), the goal is to research, design, build, and manage a theme park, using all the rides, shops, sideshows, and miscellaneous items at your disposal to attract visitors (and their money). As you do well (the criteria are never clearly defined, though), you'll be awarded golden tickets which give access to mystery

rides. Getting three golden tickets results in a golden key, used to open new parks.

The themes — Lost Kingdom, Halloween World, Wonder Land, and Space Zone — are cloying to all but the youngest of children. An entertaining exclamation point-shaped Advisor assists you by popping in with briefings on breakdowns, customer needs, etc., but his jokes and advice quickly get stale. Luckily, he can be turned off.

Just like in Rollercoaster Tycoon, you hire staff, take out loans, expand your park, and get involved in management. Rides are mildly customizable, but limit your involvement mainly to speed, capacity, and researching new upgrades. Only track-based layouts, kiddie cars, and water floats can be designed by the player, and doing so is incredibly easy, the trade-off being a lack of authenticity and complexity. This game's selling point (and what Tycoon lacked) is that you can actually "ride" any of your attractions or wander around the park in first-person. It sounds better than it is. Riding a rollercoaster is fun the first time, but the graphics are too unrealistic to simulate the experience, while the disturbingly cherubic, disembodied heads of fellow riders are adorably gruesome.

If building up your own park gets boring (and it undoubtedly will, due to the lack of variety), you can go online and visit other user-designed parks or take snapshots and send them to friends via e-
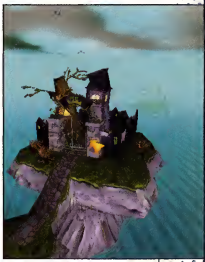
This is where bad editors who miss deadlines get sent.

mail. Sim Theme Park is a nice place to visit, but only rug rats will want to stay for long.

— CHUCK OSBORN's collection of cherubic, disembodied heads is currently on display at the Smithsonian Institute

GRAPHICS
Acid flashbacks aren't this trippy.

SOUND
Music and sound are pleasant and unobtrusive, but nothing special.

DEPTH
Not nearly as addictive as Rollercoaster Tycoon; once you unlock all the parks there's not much to do.

DESIGN
Heavy on fantasy, light on realism, and very easy to master.

RATING 6

Pluses
→ Seamless tutorial advice
→ Easy to get into
→ Ride all the rides

Minuses
→ Too juvenile for adults
→ Not enough variety
→ Most rides aren't worth riding

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The Worst Of The 20th Century

Every sports website, magazine, and TV show has recently unveiled its "Best of the 20th Century" list. Sure, they're vaguely interesting, but at PCXL we decided to take a look back at the 20th Century and uncover the worst, most embarrassing, or just generally awful things that have happened in sports over the last 100 years. In the spirit of this generosity, we saw fit to give out some awards, too.

THE WORST USE OF A TIMEOUT AWARD
WINNER --> Chris Webber (playing for Michigan vs. Duke)
WHAT HAPPENED --> Down by only two points with 11 seconds remaining in the NCAA Championship game, he called the timeout that didn't exist. As a result, Duke got to shoot technical free throws and won the game. Webber went on to a disappointing career in the NBA — until now

Chris Webber

THE MOST UNFORTUNATE NAME AWARD
WINNER --> Rusty Kuntz
WHAT HAPPENED --> God only knows what his parents were thinking. The right fielder for the Tigers was quick to point out that his name is pronounced KOONTZ. Sure is funnier pronounced the other way

Rusty Kontz

THE WORST FRANCHISE IN THE NFL AWARD
WINNER --> New Orleans Saints
WHAT HAPPENED --> They've consistently sucked ever since they entered the NFL, and even in their good years they couldn't manage one playoff win — so very sad

Saints

THE WORST PENALTY IN NFL HISTORY AWARD
WINNER --> "15 Yards For Giving The Quarterback The Business"
WHAT HAPPENED --> Ref got caught up in the moment and renamed "roughing the quarterback"

THE WORST SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD
WINNER --> Latrell Sprewell
WHAT HAPPENED --> Tried to choke his coach for calling him a "hot dog" and as a result moved from the woeful Warriors to the Championship Series-bound Knicks. When P.J. Carlesimo offered to shake his hand at their next meeting, Sprewell refused. Classless all the way

Latrell Sprewell

THE WORST TIME TO PICK UP A HOOKER AWARD
WINNER --> Eugene Robinson
WHAT HAPPENED --> While preparing for the Super Bowl, Eugene thought it might be a good time to order up a hooker — he forgot that every nosey reporter in the entire world was staying in his hotel

Eugene Robinson

THE WORST CURSE AWARD
WINNER --> Boston Red Sox
WHAT HAPPENED --> Ever since the BoSox traded the portly left-handed pitcher Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees, the franchise has been amazingly pitiful. The pinnacle of the curse was the ground ball passing through Bill Buckner's legs, which lost them the World Series

Babe Ruth

THE WORST REASON EVER FOR BEING ON THE DISABLED LIST
WINNER --> Depression
WHAT HAPPENED --> Pete Harnisch, the ace of the Mets staff, while his team was in the middle of a Pennant Race, spent two months on the DL because he was depressed. At the same time Cal Ripken, Jr., played in his 350 millionth straight game on a team which hadn't come close to the World Series since "Miami Vice" was the number one TV show — now who should've been depressed?

THE WORST (AND LAST) WORDS UTTERED BY HOWARD COSELL
WINNER --> "Look at that little monkey go"
WHAT HAPPENED --> Calling play-by-play for what would be his final Monday Night Football game, Howard Cosell used these words to describe the movements of Washington Redskin wide receiver Alvin Garrett. The world considered it a racial slur and the clueless Howard was rendered jobless

Howard Cosell

THE WORST TRADE EVER AWARD
WINNER --> Herschel Walker to the Cowboys
WHAT HAPPENED --> The Minnesota Vikings traded 11 players and seven draft picks for Herschel Walker. Walker sucked, the Vikings kept losing in the playoffs, and the Cowboys, mainly behind the power of their drafts, became a dynasty. Blame it on Mike Lynn

Harshal Walker

THE WORST LIFETIME BAN AWARD
WINNER --> Major League Baseball
WHAT HAPPENED --> Steve Howe recently pitched in the major leagues after coming back from his SEVENTH lifetime ban from the game for drug and alcohol violations. He was also banned from his daughter's softball league, pending a background check by the softball league — now that's bad

---

THE WORST USE OF REPLAY AWARD
WINNER --> ABC Sports
WHAT HAPPENED --> Joe Theismann suffered a compound fracture to his Tibia (i.e., broke his leg in frickin' half) and the booth decided they would show the snapping over and over again from every angle possible

Joe Theismann

THE WORST TEAM NAME AWARD
WINNER --> Banana Slugs
WHAT HAPPENED --> UC Santa Cruz's student voted name. Evidently they were all high — not unusual in Santa Cruz

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THE STANDINGS

Last month Microsoft sent their best against EA and got beat down. This month the only other contender, Fox Sports, tried its hand at hoops — and boy did it fail miserably. At least Microsoft managed a couple of good games. All we've seen from Fox so far has been abysmal. Love live EA!

	GAME TITLE	W	L
BASKETBALL	NBA Live 2000	2	0
	NBA Inside Drive 2000	1	2
	NBA Basketball 2000	0	1
FOOTBALL	Madden 2000	2	0
	NFL Fever 2000	1	0
	NFL Blitz	0	2
GOLF	Links LS 99	7	0
	Jack Nicklaus 6	6	1
	PGA Championship 99	5	2
	Tiger Woods 99	4	3
	Golden Tee Golf	3	4
	Pro 18 World Tour	2	5
	Links Extreme	0	2
HOCKEY	NHL Hockey 99	2	0
	NHL Hockey 98	1	1
	Powerplay 98	0	2
BASEBALL	High Heat 2K	4	0
	Triple Play 2K	3	1
	Microsoft Baseball 2K	2	2
	Hardball 6: 2K Edition	1	3
	Baseball 2K Edition (VR)	0	2
SOCCER	FIFA 2000	0	2
	Fox Sports Soccer	0	1

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He may suck but he's not dumb → Chris Dudley is a Yale graduate

DEVELOPER →	Radical Entertainment
PUBLISHER →	Fox Sports Interactive
REQUIRED →	P200, 32MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive, 75MB hard drive
IDEAL →	PII400, 128MB RAM, 350MB hard drive, 8MB 3D accelerator, no-doze

NBA Basketball 2000

This ain't basketball ... it's Ass-ketball

ACCELE-RATED

At least the read.me file is honest — any card older than a TNT and you're looking at framerate hell. It moves at the pace of college basketball before the shot clock.

Key Stats at the Half

Quality Assurance
Shame on you!

14 Chris Dudley
Pts	Reb	Blk
187	12	10
PLAYER OF THE GAME
There's your realism.

T his must've been what happened ... **Head Suit at Fox Sports:** Okay guys, basketball season is just around the corner, and we've got to get our new game out in time to take advantage of this crucial sales period.

Development Team: Huh? We thought the game wasn't due out until next year! It's called NBA Basketball 2000, isn't it?

Suit: Um, well, that's how the titles of sports games work these days, fellas. So, what you're trying to say is that you're a year behind schedule? This isn't good at all. Well, show me what you've got so far.

Team: Well, we've got a lot of the graphics in place, but damn, the players look really silly. We thought it would be funny to give them oversized shoulders and put stupid grins on some of the faces until we were ready to finalize things.

Suit: Hmmm, you're right ... they do look pretty ridiculous, but we can probably get away with it. How do they move?

Team: The motion capture work we've done so far is decent — not on par with either of EA Sports' last three basketball games, but hey, we'll have that "Fox Sports Attitude" to carry us through, right?

Suit: Um, okay. I can live with how things are graphically, so we should be in pretty good shape. I'm assuming you had most of the gameplay in place before you moved on to the graphics?

Team: You know what happens when you assume, big guy. We're

Anyone, no matter how bad, can head down the court without fear.

pretty much screwed here. The computer players can fake it on the offensive end, but we haven't even started putting in any defensive AI code. You can take any player you want — even the worst ball-handler in the league — and force your way under the basket for a slam-dunk ... every time. It's really quite fun for three or four minutes. In fact, Joe here was able to stay awake for an entire game, and racked up 187 points using just Chris Dudley of the Knicks!

Suit: Shit, I could outplay Dudley. So, we've got no gameplay worth talking about ... are there any extras to distract buyers from noticing how bad the game is?

Team: Not really. Even the player editor sucks. You can't actually edit the players, and the limited options we've put in for creating your own players are really weak.

Suit: We're pretty much screwed.

Team: Yout betcha. But at least we'll be able to sell a shitload of copies before those bozos over at PCXL get one and slam us in their damn review.

GRAPHICS
We've seen worse, but EA Sports isn't going to be shaking in its boots anytime soon.

SOUND
By far the best part of the game. Doc Rivers does a really good job with the color commentary.

CONTROL
Horrendous. Players constantly run out of bounds and you have a better chance on rebounds if you don't jump.

REALISM
You're kidding, right? This is probably the worst attempt at a sports game as we've ever seen.

RATING 1

➕ Pluses
→ Decent announcing
→ This review is finished
→ Suggestions anyone?

➖ Minuses
→ It was programmed
→ It was burned on a CD
→ You may accidentally buy it

The fleet-footed Chris Dudley outruns the pack on his way to another rim-rocking dunk.

DEVELOPER ⟶	Point Of View
PUBLISHER ⟶	Infogrames
REQUIRED ⟶	P233, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive
IDEAL ⟶	PII400, 128MB RAM, 350MB hard drive, 8MB 3D accelerator, no brain

NFL Blitz 2000

Mindless fun or just plain stupid?

ACCELE-RATED

NFL Blitz 2000 sports nice graphics no matter which 3D card you have. The game really does look great, however that's about the only thing great about it.

Arcade-perfect = shallow

It's not brain surgery.

NFL QUAKE

If they are going to allow late hits and pass interference in *NFL Blitz*, why not let the Quake Marine in on a game? Here are some ways the game would change.

ROCKET-JUMP INTO THE END ZONE
The ultimate goal line maneuver, QM would easily lead the league in TDs

TWO DEEP ZONE WITH RAIL GUNNER
Let's see those sissy receivers go over the middle when QM is packing a rail-gun and playing centerfield

GLOCK, GLOCK
Under center QM would scream "Glock, Glock" until the D jumped offsides

FLAG CAPTURE
During the singing of the national anthem QM would race to the flag, steal it and bring it back to his team's bench

---

I s it really possible to get excited about an arcade game ported to a console, then ported to a PC? I suppose if you're one of those football blasphemers who enjoyed playing *Blitz* in the arcade, then its arrival on the PC may be of some interest. For you, and only you, I carry on ...

The translation of this fantasy hardball gridiron game is well done, and much smoother than last year's version on the PC. However there are some fundamental problems with *Blitz* on the PC. First off, *Blitz* is only good for quick head-to-head play with a friend. No problem. If you've got a friend and two Sidewinder controllers (not likely in most cases), then you're all set — that is once you fanagle the wonky set-up in the game to get them to work. OK, only 30 minutes and you're all ready to play a game, a game that is admittedly fun — for about 10 minutes. The PC is not designed for "quick" gaming experiences, especially games that involve confusing, over-complicated peripheral setups.

You select your teams and bash players in the head and commit penalty after penalty — you and your friend are really yucking it up now. By the time the seemingly random interceptions and general pummeling ends, you're mysteriously compelled to a rematch, and pretty much the same things happen again. Only this time it isn't quite so funny or entertaining. The wacky plays and vicious hits of the

Perhaps the only game the Saints will win for quite some time.

There isn't anything wrong with manhandling the Cowboys.

NFL are brilliant, but when the game has nothing but wacky plays and vicious hits it takes away the wacky and vicious nature of said game. Let me 'splain ... if on every tackle you knock someone's helmet off it is no longer "cool" to see someone's helmet get knocked off — it's now the norm. And that is why *NFL Blitz* is only good in 10-minute doses.

Even the repetitive "attitude" would be tolerable if *Blitz* managed to pull it off better. They spent the money on the NFL and Players license, yet it doesn't seem to matter if you're Chris Chandler or Jerry Ball. If players' strength came into effect then at least they would have some personality.

The only enhancement for the PC over the Arcade version is a Play Editor, which is really pretty cool

until you realize none of it makes a difference when actually playing the game.

Despite all of my complaints, I have to admit that I had fun playing *Blitz*, I just think that the occasional game at the pizza parlor is enough to keep you satisfied. ➤

GRAPHICS
Just like the arcade, with nice-looking resolutions up to 1600x1200.

SOUND
The same overdone crunches and annoying commentator from the arcade — after 10 minutes you'll want to kill him.

CONTROL
With a Sidewinder it works quite well; the passing is especially good.

REALISM
Hah! You make me laugh.

RATING 5

➕ Pluses
→ Arcade perfect
→ Play Editor
→ It's football

➖ Minuses
→ Worth 50 cents, not $50
→ Can't rip off Brett Favre's arms
→ It's not really football

PCXL FIGHT NIGHT
EVERQUEST VS. ASHERON'S CALL

Everquest did almost as much to sucker-punch productivity here at the luxurious *PC Accelerator* offices as *Quake 3 Test* did. Dubbed "the crack cocaine" of online games, we tossed caution (and our workloads) to the wind and sucked *EQ* up. But like any good party, the lightweights around here dropped out of sight and only the devoted (i.e. the real geeks) were left.

Then the phone rang and Asheron was on the line. *Asheron's Call* meant there was a brand new geeky pipe on which to suck. Like magic, the crowd of gaming professionals split into two camps with much "That sucks!" and "No, no, it's cool!" hurled back and forth. When the smoke cleared, this holy relic you see before you lay on the ground, pulsating and throbbing with decisive information. (Yeah, right ... Holy relic.)

ROUND ONE — GRAPHICS

EVERQUEST: A wide variety of player models and skins, but the *Turok*-fogged landscape is just so '90s. The fantastic monster models look like they burst right out of the D&D Monster Manual.

ASHERON'S CALL: We hope the fifth grader who whipped these models up saves me to bucks Turbine paid him. In stark contrast, the landscape is vast and beautiful, with deep forests and towering mountains.

IN THE CORNERS: Both boys took some lumps here — trading terrain body blows for tooth-crunching modeling. But the polygonal breasts in *EQ* are far superior.

EDGE: *Everquest*

ROUND TWO — INTERFACE

EVERQUEST: What happens when you let programmers make the interface? An ugly but functional icon rack. Once you complete the "customize your interface" quest, you win the Functional Interface of Ugliness. It was okay in the beta, but retail customers expect more.

ASHERON'S CALL: It's Windows, see? All the familiar buttons, scroll bars, and the "x" in the top right — they're all there! Pretty icons to the left of me, labeled tabs to the right, and easy to read text all around.

IN THE CORNERS: *Everquest* slips on some blood and is looking ugly. *Asheron's Call* lays in some intuitive jabs and takes the round.

EDGE: *Asheron's Call*

ROUND THREE — SOUND

EVERQUEST: Doors creak, water splashes, birds tweet, and your sword swishes.

ASHERON'S CALL: Doors creak, water splashes, birds tweet, and your sword swishes.

IN THE CORNERS: Blind men can't tell the difference between the two.

EDGE: No winner

ROUND FOUR — SOCIAL INTERACTION

EVERQUEST: Two breeds populate Norrath — power levelers and role-players. The former have used their formidable math skills to calculate maximum returns per activity in order to alienate the role-players as fast as possible. The role-players are there to say "thee" and "whence" and imagine they are at a GENCON convention.

ASHERON'S CALL: Because stuff is fairly easy to get and travel is not particularly hazardous, a lot of focus falls onto the *AC* allegiance system. In this system you assemble a feudal pyramid of ho's that you pimp out for XP. It gets people talking more about other people and less about "the purple nubicle knuclebones of Zxa'Zingus."

IN THE CORNERS: Server populations don't lie — *EQ* takes a

pyramid scheme to the biscuits, but delivers a massive subscriber list to *AC*'s jaw at the last moment.

EDGE: *Everquest*

ROUND FIVE — CHARACTER GROWTH

EVERQUEST: Old school RPG lives on in Norrath. Elven wizards, ogre warriors, and human rangers start out in their own special racially-divided ghettos. You can almost smell Gary Gygax coming out of the monitor.

ASHERON'S CALL: You'd think you were in a Brooklyn DJ competition 'cause it's all about skills in Derreth. Do what you like you like spell-casting, sword-swinging, bread-baking madman! Whatever you do, you better get used to doing it human style, because elves and dwarves are too good to heed the call.

IN THE CORNERS: *EQ* draws a crowd with its traditional D&D moves, while *AC* brings in newer blood since it's not quite as geeky. It's pencil necks vs. IRC hackers in a magical duel — is it even possible to say *either* side is a winner?

THE WINNER IS:

In a last-second shocker, *EQ* flattens *AC* with its box art foldout, thick with voluptuous fantasy babes bursting out of their skimpy armor. TKO in the sixth round — *Everquest* has it!

THE ONLINE NUISANCE

This month we take to the servers to find the best ways to annoy the hell out of players in *AOE II*. As always, winning is the best tactic, but if that isn't possible then these little treats will at least give you a little notoriety.
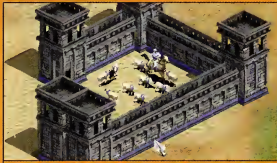
He who controls the sheep controls the universe!

SHEEP HERDER

WHAT IT IS ---: Take your scout around the map and turn every sheep (build a stable and an army of scouts to pull this off best), then take them all to one corner of the map. Now build a wall around them (and a villager so they don't turn). Go to the map and point everyone to your contraption saying something like, "I have the sheep, now surrender before I unleash them"

WHY IT'S ANNOYING ---: Because while they are trying to focus on micromanaging the hell out of their powerful force you have pointlessly taken all of the sheep. They will either laugh or try to take back their sheep. Either way, it's quite entertaining

CANNON GALLEON FODDER

WHAT IT IS ---: Race through the ages with a total focus on a shipyard and an eventual goal of Cannon Galleons — a whole shitload of 'em. Crank out as many as possible and support them with fireships and galleons. Now wander the map and destroy anything near the water

WHY IT'S ANNOYING ---: If you build up a massive navy you can control the seas. You won't win games, but can't lose either. Anytime someone inches too close to the water you can destroy them. This is especially annoying on maps like Continental, Rivers, and Mediterranean

ELEPHANTS ONLY

WHAT IT IS ---: Select the Persians and don't create any human army at all. Instead focus everything on elephants, building as many as possible and taking down everyone on the map. When attacking, say something like, "We come for your peanuts"

WHY IT'S ANNOYING ---: It's actually a pretty damn effective attack force and really frustrating to have an entire population of intelligent humans get destroyed by a train of elephants

ET TU BRUTÉP

WHAT IT IS ---: Make an alliance with another player and tell him not to worry about the defenses on the east side of the village, because you've got him covered. Make a secret alliance (through private messages) with another player. Now put all of your attacking units at the east side of his base for "protection." Quickly turn from ally to enemy and destroy his base from the inside out. Ally with your secret partner and the win is yours.

WHY IT'S ANNOYING ---: Nothing's more treacherous than traitors, especially when they've set you up. Your opponent will likely forget to switch from ally to enemy and you'll have free attack on his base. Bonus points if you use the name "Benedict"

WHEN SCREEN SHOTS GO BAD

Name: BobaFuct

BobaFuct likes to play "Domination" in *Unreal Tournament*, since he usually gets blown ... away.

... Holyfield is the second highest earning athlete in the world (behind Michael Jordan)

STRATEGY

HALF-LIFE:
OPPOSING FORCE

IT'S NOT A SHAME, IT'S A STRAGEDY!™

If you've made your way to the end of *Half-Life*, then most of the tricks, traps, and puzzles of *Opposing Force* will be very familiar. That's not to say that they're easy — exploration and creative use of the new weapons and the environment is needed to get past many areas without constant re-loading of a previous saved game. But to make sure that you fully enjoy the experience of *OpFor* (as it's known by the "in" crowd), here are a few tips and tricks to help smooth over any of the rough bits.

PUZZLING TRICKS

Since the Black Mesa Research Facility has been shot to pieces, there are loads of dangerously exposed power cords flickering with electricity, just waiting to fry a careless marine. Getting by most of them is a cinch, so long as you know what to look for. What follows are a few examples.

Timing is key to some of the puzzles. When emerging into these areas, take a moment to look around and find the exit before stepping into the room. In this instance, just time your movements past the pulsing power charges.

Indestructible crates (including this one packed with explosives) can be pushed and pulled to allow access to new areas. Here, the test fire switch shoots a fierce blast of flame through this area — and with the chain reaction started by pushing the crate into the path of the flame, a hole is shattered in the floor.
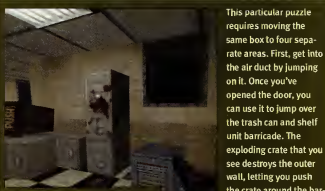
This particular puzzle requires moving the same box to four separate areas. First, get into the air duct by jumping on it. Once you've opened the door, you can use it to jump over the trash can and shelf unit barricade. The exploding crate that you see there destroys the outer wall, letting you push the crate around the barricade, giving you access to this previously inaccessible air shaft.

(Left) Exploding crates are used effectively in many puzzles. Shooting this one releases the robot to complete its task and allow you to get down the ladder to clear the radioactive waste away.
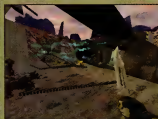
(Left) Don't touch the bad blue bolts. They're very, very bad. But there is always a way to get to whatever goodies you can see behind these barriers. Look for the power switches — these gray boxes are evidently standard government issue and you'll see quite a few .

Beware falling masonry. This early trap is annoying since unless you're really lucky (or have thoroughly studied this strategy), you're likely to die three or four times before you get the pattern of the blasts and know where to stand. Well, stand where the screenshot shows, watch the pretty explosions, then leap up onto the fallen walkway.

Aside from moving boxes and crates, always be on the lookout for other items that can be pushed around the levels. Chairs, and in this instance, a rolling platform, can give you a leg up to get to new areas, or to jump onto high boxes that seem to have ammo and health packs always agonizingly just out of reach.

If you've gone through the basic training, you know to expect at least one rope swing test. This is it, but it's not as complicated as it first seems. You don't need to be pixel-perfect in your leaps and swings to avoid getting electrocuted, since one shot on the power box on the wall destroys the coursing current, allowing you to take your merry old time to swing and jump across the gap.

Manipulating this trolley requires a few steps. First destroy the exploding crate on top of it. Then, up in the control room, move the trolley to this point, jump on the crates (using the crouch/jump combo) and onto the trolley. Kill the HeadCrab and leap across the slime to open the door. From the crate with the energy pack, leap back across the slime, up to the trolley, onto the crate where the HeadCrab was and over the slime to safety.

WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION

Opposing Force added some great weapons to the *Half-Life* armory with the simplest often having the most practical, varied, and effective uses in skilled hands.

DISPLACER
Essentially a one-shot kill, this powerful but slow weapon destroys creatures or zaps them back to their home world. Since it's so slow, don't try to use it on the Black Ops.

SPORE LAUNCHER
Be thankful you don't have to kill this thing to get to use it as a weapon. Its devastating spit evaporates even some of the biggest foes (this was fired at the one-eyed dude, and that puff of green smoke is all that's left). Very limited uses means that you should save this for the toughest pickles — when you need that vital one-shot kill.

M249 SAW
When your back's against the wall, the M249 SAW is your best friend. The down side is its limited rounds (50) that can be fired before reloading, and the slow reloading itself. Preserve ammo by firing in short blasts.

GRAPPLE
Taking the Barnacle creature and sticking it on your hand creates an organic grappling hook. A new plant can be found on the walls and ceilings, giving off a musky green light. Aim for these pods to span seemingly impassable gaps.

SHOCK RIFLE
Its primary use is as a rapid-fire weapon, though each individual shot doesn't appear to do much damage. It's useful when you have cover for popping out and unloading all 10 shots, then skulking back to let it recharge before repeating.

SNIPER RIFLE
This a game-changing weapon. Before you get it, listen for the distinctive single-shot sound it makes, then slaughter the user on his camouflaged perch. Use ammo wisely, and always go for the single head shot.

DESERT EAGLE
This new pistol is effective in quick-fire mode and devastating in slower laser-targeted mode. In this latter setup, while it doesn't have zoom capability, it can be used with careful aim, pegging enemies at distance with a one-shot head kill.

BESTIARY

VOLTIGORE
This blubbery creature's electrical attack is devastating.
Kill Method: Since they require a huge amount of ammo to defeat, try using the Displacer for a one-shot kill. When they appear out of nowhere, grenades from your secondary MP5 attack or hand grenades are effective, or the "snark" creatures are great to use. Strategic use of claymores can also be effective.

SHOCK TROOPER
After you've killed your first beast, let its organic weapon jump at you — it's a recharging 10-shot plasma gun. (Once you've got one, kill the other "weapons," otherwise they'll attack). They tend to use cover, showing only a small portion of their large frame, allowing them to fire plasma attacks then retreat while it recharges.
Kill Method: Hit them with the M249 while they're recharging. Alternatively, one sharp shot in the eye from the sniper rifle is all it takes.

PIT DRONE
At a distance their dart attack can be dodged, but it's difficult. Up close, its claws can cause a lot of damage.
Kill Method: A shotgun blast to the head as they race towards you is the most effective response.

THE ULTIMATE BOT WORKOUT

E V E R Y T H I N G   I   K N O W   A B O U T   U N R E A L   I   L E A R N E D   F R O M   B O T S !

In the old days (1998, or "The Eight" as we called it back then) the only way you could improve at deathmatch was hour after hour of full contact fragging. The problem is it would take too long to get good enough to compete at a decent level, and most of that time would be spent respawning (or re-dying). You'd have to start from scratch every time a big new game came out. Now, thanks to the release of *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena*, you now have a better way to learn deathmatch. The advent of bots in these two games makes practice possible. Forget about the days of humiliating defeats and prepare to kick some AI butt.

THE WORKOUT

First off, you need to get a feel for being on top ... uh, we mean the top dog. Your best bet is to start *Unreal Tournament* and play start to finish at the novice level. This may take a while, but it's extremely important for you to know what it's like to win big. Attitude is everything in deathmatch and there's no such thing as winning nice.

Once you feel extremely confident at this level, you should practice a few easy taunts. Don't get fancy yet, they're only bots and they won't appreciate wordiness. A quick "gotcha," "haha," or even a Stuart Scott-like "booyow" is easy to type and a great starting point. Remember, you've got to learn to be cocky, or else you'll look like a wimp when the game starts.

☑ *Play through entire Unreal Tournament at easiest level.*
☑ *Master three quick and weird taunts.*

Your first step should be to slaughter as many innocent bots as you can, just to get the feel for blood.

UP THE ANTE

It would take far too long to play through another *Tournament* at a higher level, so focus on raising your skills. Pick a few favorite maps and try them against bots at different levels until you can win from time to time, but not so easy that you win every match. The challenge is to fight against like skills until you can go to the next level without getting slaughtered.

☑ *Play Three Deathmatch levels at Average Skill until you can win a match to 30 by at least ten points.*
☑ *Repeat at higher skill levels until you reach a point that you do not win more than 75 percent of your matches. This is your comfort level.*

NOTE → → *Don't forget that you're a PCXL reader. Many people will tell you that teamplay is important, but if you read this magazine you ought to know better. The truth is that gaming is all about personal glory. If you're playing Capture the Flag, then you'd better be the one going on the flag runs. Don't worry, some PC Gamer or CGW reader will happily sit on defense like an idiot.*

☑ *Play three matches of each mode and determine which gives you the most impressive personal score.*

FIND YOUR NICHE

Developing deathmatch skills is a matter of focus, so don't try to be great at everything all at once. Now is a good time to find out what your best *Unreal Tournament* skill is. First, play three levels of deathmatch, then three Domination levels, then three Capture the Flag levels, and finally three Assault levels. Remember your scores and judge which of these game modes provides you with the biggest leads over your teammates and enemies. Take the time to master this mode. Nobody really needs to know you're one dimensional.

Try a few levels using the instafrag weapons. If you learn to use these well, you'll improve your shooting skills.

TRAINERS

Now it's time to get a little creative in your bot workout. This will train you to spot playing styles and know how to counteract them.

First, start a practice deathmatch session and set the number of bots to three. Now, click the configure button and let's start creating some unique competition.

TEST ONE → → THE SCAREDY CAT
Crank the skill levels up on the first three bots to the very top. Give each the Flak Cannon as its favorite weapon. Turn their Strafing levels up and their combat style to Avoidant. Defeating these bots will help you when fighting pattern runners and let you pick up easy kills from unarmed opponents.

☑ *Defeat three Scaredy Cats at a difficulty above your comfort level.*

LEARN FROM YOUR BOTS

When you play capture the flag, throw your flag to a bot, and then protect him. Learning to protect the flag carrier is as important as learning to get the flag yourself. Just shoot him before he gets the points.

GREED IS GOOD

Nothing is more frustrating than having a weapon or power-up stolen by a bot. So, create a practice Assault level, and click off the Weapons Stay button in the Rules tab. In Assault, your bots will crowd around you and steal every power-up you need unless you get them first. Learn to get them first.

LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE WAY

A teammate that gets in the way can be really infuriating, too. So, set up another Assault course and this time set Friendly Fire up to 100 percent. This will help you know the consequences of getting in a teammates' way and it will also help you check your fire in tight combat situations.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

You should play through an entire *Unreal Tournament* at different levels to watch where the bots like to hang out. The bot AI is programmed with nodes that the developers laid out. If you find bots settled into a great defense point, learn where it is, because real players will use that spot themselves. Make sure that the spot becomes your home during any match.

ONWARD YOUNG MAN!

Finally, when you play Assault, you'll quickly learn a major trick of the trade: Bots have a distinct pattern for attack and defense. If you learn these patterns you can beat them by going where they least expect. If you carry this over to your battles with humans you'll have much success. ➤

TEST TWO ⇢ THE JUMPER

Don't you hate guys that jump all over the screen? Well, you can learn how to beat them cold. Crank the skill levels up on the first three bots to the very top. Give each the Eightball as its favorite weapon. Now turn their Alertness levels to the highest point their Strafing levels to low and their Combat style to Normal. Finally, click the Jumpy Behavior checkbox and fight. Battling these bots is an excellent way to develop anticipation skills.

☑ *Defeat three Jumpers at one difficulty above your comfort level.*

TEST THREE ⇢ THE CAMPER

Ah, learning to fight the sneaky camper is the most important of all deathmatch skills. To create campers, crank Skill Adjust, Accuracy, and Camping levels all the way up. Give each bot the Sniper Rifle as their favorite weapon, set its Combat Style to Cautious, and choose a map with plenty of camping areas. Once you find the correct methods and weapons needed to defeat campers, you'll know how to stuff them in real matches.

☑ *Defeat three Campers at one difficulty above your comfort level.*

TEST FOUR ⇢ THE BERSERKERS

Crank 'em up in Alertness, Strafing, and Skill Adjust; drop their camping levels to zero, and their accu-

racy to 50 percent. Give each a Minigun as their favorite weapon. Finally, turn their combat style to Berserk. Now you should be constantly under attack.

☑ *Defeat three Berserkers at one difficulty above your comfort level.*

TEST FIVE ⇢ THE TOUGH GUYS

These bots should be the toughest you face, because they'll also be the most balanced. Crank these bots up in Alertness, Strafing, Accuracy and Skill Adjust. You should drop their camping levels to zero. Give one a Minigun, the second a

Flak Cannon, and the third an Eightball as their favorite weapons. Finally turn their combat style to Aggressive and click jumpy behavior on one of the bots. Build your skills against such bots and you'll be ready to fight deathmatchers.

☑ *Defeat three Tough Guys at one difficulty above your comfort level.*

TEST SIX ⇢ THE SHOWDOWN

Now, create one of each of the bots that you've just defeated exactly as explained above. Name each of the bots the exact same weapon and make sure they all have the exact same Color, Class, Skin, and Face. Because they all look the same, you will be forced to discover their playing style by their actions only. It can be very tricky, but a skill worth gaining.

☑ *Play against all five bots ONLY to determine which bot is playing which specific style.*

☑ *Defeat all five bot styles at one difficulty above your comfort level. Use the methods you learned against the individual AI styles even when you're playing against multiple bots.*

99

Death of the PC

—Yeah, Right

The pressure is on. After a year of lackluster game sales figures and spiraling marketing budgets, the PC's status as the dominant game platform is beginning to look shaky. In spite of the mammoth increase in sales of new PCs, more people connecting to the Internet, and numerous great games from which to choose, publishers are no doubt getting antsy at the disappointing returns and the future threat of the next generation of game consoles. Where does the PC stand? **PCXL** sips a few brewskies and ponders ...

Repeat after us: TVs are for Mario, Buffy, and porno (but not necessarily in that order). Oh, and ESPN if there's a good game on.

THE BAD NEWS

When you look at the PC games that have topped the charts over the course of 1999 there are few monumental stand-outs. The latest figures available from *PC Data* at press time only covered the year to September, and in that time, Maxis' *Sim City* 3000 topped the pile to the tune of 470,000 units and nearly $20 million revenue.

Very nice, thank you very much. Next, with over 300,000 units sold and revenues heading towards $15 million, *Baldur's Gate* created an almost audible sigh of relief from publisher Interplay.

Indeed, the top 10 PC products of 1999 (including *Deer Hunter II 3D*) all reaped revenues in the several millions. But as you head down the list, the number of unit sales drops off alarmingly and even high-profile games like *Descent 3* (a critical success and **PCXL** Killer Game recipient) snatched less than 40,000 unit

Want to play *Sim City* with a gamepad? Be our guest.

sales in its six month stint on the charts. While that number accounts for about $1.7 million revenue, it's not enough to keep publishers plugging at long, expensive development cycles in the hope of scoring a *Half-Life* (curiously itself having sold what seems a mere 290,000 units in 1999).

So what happens now? The number of games that would be considered "hardcore" PC titles is likely to drop in 2000. Unfortunately, it also means that cheap-to-produce junk like hunting games and extreme sports atrocities will further flood the market. Let's face it, that sucks Rosie O'Donnell-sized ass. That's a lot of ass.

While you're trying to erase that horrible image from your head, consider this: The problems for the

PC market don't end there. News about Sony's Internet-ready PlayStation2 (and Microsoft's rumored X-Box) has piqued interest in every conceivable gaming circle. In the race for the living room-based PC, consoles have the edge because they're already right there next to the family VCR. Of course, you're not going to get the depth so vital to many core PC games, but you're also not likely to get all of those annoying hardware hiccups, either.

THE GOOD NEWS

Whereas deciding the Game of the Year for 1999 inspired an interesting debate due to a lack of obvious contenders, we already foresee the entirely opposite problem next year. Deep breath: *Diablo 2*, *C&C: Renegade*, *Team Fortress 2*, *WarCraft III* (we're hoping), *Block and White*, *Halo* and *Obi-Wan* each have the potential to suck our time and gaming dollars.

Scarily, luminaries such as Peter Molyneux have already suggested that a top quality PC game's devel-

FANTASY FRAG

Valentine's Day, Part 2: The Sickening

WHY WE HATE IT —> If Valentine's Day were a "real" holiday, we'd at least get the day off. VD is merely another opportunity for evil corporate department stores to tear down tacky Christmas decorations and start pumping the love-starved public for everything it's worth. As soon as the clock strikes midnight on February 14, cheap paper cherubs and tasteless chocolate hearts will be replaced by cheap plastic baskets and tasteless chocolate bunnies. It's not our faults VD sucks (no pun intended), it's the evil corporate bastards.

HOW IT SHOULD BE FRAGGED —> Our bitterness has had time to infect and raise pus pockets on our love-deprived psyches, and we plan to pop our zits in the face of the bastards to blame. We're not talking veto, we're talking a new holiday: Malentine's Day! If you're a regular **PCXL** reader, you may remember we proposed this last year, to a response that could be best described as ambivalent. Come on guys, when January 30 comes around, tell that special lady in your life (or your mom) that you expect beer, basketball tickets, and a cool electronic gadget to make up for the countless cards and chocolates you've spent your hard-earned bucks on all these years. (See page 109 for more.)

Scenes from *Halo* and *Team Fortress II* — two games you won't be seeing on a console anytime soon ... if ever.

opment could start pushing towards three years. For most publishers, the uncertain return on that investment could kill many projects before they even start.

Here's an idea: One of the reasons that console systems thrive is because game designers are forced to innovate with creative ideas, since they know the hardware has a set life span. PC game developers should adopt a similar attitude (and it seems that the people at Blizzard and Microsoft have caught on to this), creating games that are playable on any system, tested to death, and offer compelling gameplay over technological jiggery-pokery. Succeed and Johnny Consumer will be less afraid to spend his cash on a PC game, having greater confidence that it'll work out of the box.

And let's face it, the mouse/keyboard control method for first-person shooters and realtime strategy games are out of the reach of the console systems — that's a major ace in the hole for PC game makers. If the PC does die (and no, we don't really think it will), then we'll be known as *Console Accelerator* — the best console magazine anywhere, dammit.
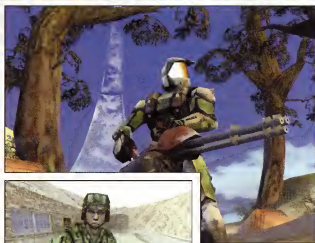
"If I ever catch that Crash Bandicoot nosing around here, he can kiss his furry, marsupial mascot ass goodbye. Damn rodents!"

THE POWER METER

We're hitting the hot holiday sales period as we finish this mag, so topping the pile this month are some current chart-toppers.

THIS MONTH	LAST MONTH	
1	9	**MICROSOFT** --> *AOE2*, *Flight Sim 2000* does business, *Asheron's Call* already has 40,000 subscribers, and *NFL Fever 2000* is selling.
2	-	**HASBRO** --> Whether it's '90s versions of *Missile Command*, *Q*Bert*, or *Pong*, or *Unreal*-engine powered *Nerf Arena Blast*, Hasbro will dominate the charts.
3	1	**ACTIVISION** --> *Quake III Arena* is a feather in their holiday cap, with *Star Trek: Hidden Evil*, *Battlezone 2* and the disappointing *I-B2* all likely to grab good sales.
4	7	**EPIC GAMES** --> *Unreal Tournament* is excellent, but the real fun will be watching *Quake*-ers and *Unreal*-ites duke it out on the sales charts and online.
5	2	**SIERRA** --> *Homeworld* may not be storming the charts, but it's getting critical kudos; *SWAT3* and *Gabriel Knight 3* are helping them overcome "restructuring."
6	10	**BLIZZARD** --> Okay, so there's disappointment that *Diablo II* won't be out till January, but when it releases, Blizzard will clean up at the cash registers.
7	3	**RED STORM** --> *Rogue Spear* continues to sell well, as does the original *R6 Gold Edition* pack.
8	-	**MATTEL** --> What do kids want at the holidays more than bloody *Pokémon*, more than Barbie? Nothing — and that's why Mattel's on the charts.
9	-	**INFOGRAMES** --> They bought up GT, who, despite their somewhat crippled status, will have *Unreal Tournament* and *Deer Hunter 3* shooting up the charts.
10	8	**INTERPLAY** --> Desperately in need of a big hit, Interplay can't throw the *Baldur's Gate*-style RPGs out the door fast enough. Hope the wave doesn't come crashing down, though.

OTHER CONTENDERS

EIDOS --> Lara sells, and that's more important than critical success. Along with several other titles like *Deus Ex*, *Anachronox*, *Hitman*, and *Republic*, it could be the start of a big year

GAMESCAN
THE PR-FRIENDLY EDITION

PR types hate PCXL because we slam bad games. Unfortunately, this really cuts down on the number of box cover quotes attributed to us, which really sucks. And since other mags have the insight to say nice things about any piece of crap that comes their way, why can't we? That's why we've asked the highly-quotable movie critic (and publicist toady) Gene Shalit to look at a few games coming to a PC near you. This doesn't mean the games will be crap — they'll probably all be a rollercoaster thrill ride that will leave us on the edge of our seats — and you can quote us on that!
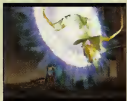
FINAL FANTASY VIII
Developer → Square
Publisher → Electronic Arts
Release Date → January 2000
The Pitch → Unless you've been on a deserted island for the past 10 years, you've heard of the *Final Fantasy* series. And since commercials for the Playstation version of *FFVIII* run nonstop on TV, you'd have to also be a deaf, blind mute. So, just in case you happen to be a deaf, blind, mute castaway (obviously reading this in the special edition 'Braille' version), here's the scoop: *FFVIII* is a Japanese anime-style RPG that follows the adventures of Squall, a young military cadet, who must defeat a powerful sorceress. For the most part, the PC game will be a straight port of its Playstation sibling with enhanced graphics and sound, so if you've already played it on the living room TV there's nothing new about this version to warrant a second purchase
Gene's Quote → "Let's hope there's nothing final about this fantasy-come-true game series. If you're a fan, you won't find anything to hate about the number eight!"

The Heat-O-Meter
MALENTINE'S EDITION

WHAT'S HOT

OBI-HAAAVE! – Rumor has it that Verant and LucasArts are teaming up on a "massively multiplayer" Star Wars game. Jedi wannabes beware: Your character starts out as a 10-year-old who gains experience points by accidentally blowing things up and yelling "yippee!" a lot.

ARTS ... ELECTRONIC ARTS – It looks like the PC is not enough for EA. They've signed a worldwide agreement with MGM Interactive to develop and publish James Bond games for multiple formats, guaranteeing more passes thrown per level than in any of their recent football games.

KNIGHT MUSIC – A music professor was so inspired by Sierra's *King's Quest: Mosk Of Eternity* that he wrote a 12-minute composition called "Daventry Suite." We've heard of some tough puzzles, but that's ridiculous.

MALENTINE'S DAY – Our alternative to the namby-pamby Valentine's Day, it represents everything that's good and decent in the world like beer, sports, and salty snacks. Guys, throw down those chocolates of oppression, toss out that bouquet of wimpitude, and free yourselves from those 14K shackles of touchy-feely romance. Our time has come!

RENTALWARE – Blockbuster has partnered with AegiSoft for a 14-city test to see whether consumers will rent PC games. It's definitely not the renting part we think they'll have a problem with — it's getting people to uninstall the games once they're done.

WHAT'S COLD

HANDHELD HO – *Tomb Raider* is coming to the Gameboy Color. The bad news — Lara will look like a flea with boobs. The worse news — this is the first new *Tomb Raider* engine in four years.

EIDOS THINK SO – Speaking of Lara, Eidos says they lost $61.8 million dollars in six months last year, mainly because they bought 51% of Ion Storm. So, that's how much it costs to sack Todd Porter.

THE LITTLEST VIRGIN – A bankrupt Gary Coleman is pimping himself out on the web. The self-avowed virgin and catch phrase icon is auctioning his belongings and even a night out on the town with the diminutive one to the highest bidder. Suddenly, it seems like Dana Plato took the easy way out.

NOT SO ULTIMA – *Ultima: Ascension* was rushed out the door to meet its Thanksgiving deadline, leaving hordes of fans to wait for promised patches. Finally, the Avatar has met his greatest foe yet: Greed.

GAME KILLER
PIKA-STEW! GOTTA BAKE 'EM ALL!

After the games, movie, cards, costumes, bath towels, and probably its very own brand of personal lubricant, we've had it up to our Squirtle with Pokémon. So, when Pokémon Project Studio — a multimedia answer to Shrinky Dinks — hit our desks, we knew vengeance would be ours.

The Project Studio lets you make Pokémon cards, stickers, key chains, tattoos, and "much more," using the magic of your very own kitchen oven. It claims you can make 'em all (but you can't — you need the blue box version, as well as the red, to get all 150), and we're impatient. We want to make 'em all right now! That's why we made our way over to the company kitchen, slapped the entire box into a pan and baked it at 350 degrees for about an hour. (Slightly longer than the suggested two minutes.) The results were a burning oven and a sentient toxic cloud that destroyed indiscriminately. Inter-office lawsuits are likely to follow. Our suggestion: Don't try this at home. ▶

THE WOMEN WE LOVE TO PLAY(BOY)

Here's another reason to bow down and praise "the man" (in this case Hugh Hefner). The lovely Tiffany Granath, of Playboy TV fame, was kind enough to get naked and let us paint her gold — wish all women were into this. You may know her from her hosting duties on the Playboy Channel's "Night Calls," where she regularly gets naked and romps around with other bunnies (the silicon implant kind, not the foraging in vegetables variety). The first time we talked to Tiffany was on her cell phone as she was shopping in a lingerie store. Several pseudo-erotic comments later, an unnamed PCXL staffer demanded that he attend the photoshoot for "artistic" purposes. In the other collection of photos, we got her into some schoolgirl outfits to satiate the sickening tastes of you, our readers. You can see more of her on Playboy's Wild-webgirls.com video, and at her own web site — www.tiffanysdomain.com. Enjoy.

TIFFANY GRANATH

The lovely Miss Granath isn't the only Tiffany we'd like to join for breakfast. Here are a few more that can scramble our eggs any day

TIFFANI-AMBER THIESSEN
TIFFANI STATUS → The hottest Tiffany in the world **FAMOUS FOR →** Leaving "Saved By The Bell" for "Beverly Hills 90210." Also starred in the direct-to-video *From Dusk Till Dawn 2* **HER FUTURE HOLDS →** Men's magazines, straight-to-video movies, *Playboy*, infomercials

TIFFANY
TIFFANY STATUS → The Tiffany forever known simply as "Tiffany" **FAMOUS FOR →** Annoying songs in shopping malls. She and Debbie Gibson took the pop world by storm for approximately one month **HER FUTURE HOLDS →** "A major comeback." Uh-huh.

TIFFANY TOWERS
TIFFANY STATUS → The biggest "towers" in the world **FAMOUS FOR →** Porn, and the ability to crush men's with the weight of her breasts **HER FUTURE HOLDS →** Inner ladies with pool boys and unusually hairy men in another porn flicks, chronic back problems

TIFFANY CAM
TIFFANY STATUS → Tiffany version of "SeeMyCam" **FAMOUS FOR →** www.tiffanycam.com **HER FUTURE HOLDS →** Lots more nudity, until she gets fat and wrinkled. At that point she'll be replaced by a younger, fitter Tiffany and whither away into oblivion

INTERNATIONAL HOTROD ASSOCIATION
Developer → Bethesda Softworks
Publisher → Bethesda Softworks
Release Date → Q1 2000
The Pitch → Fully sanctioned by the real-life International Hotrod Association, this drag-racing game will feature 10 official tracks, 50 vehicles including classics and late models, and 1/8 mile racing. If customization is your thing, then IHRA has more than 70 vehicle components ready for tinkering, not to mention a full feature paint shop to give your ride that personal touch. With so few drag racing games on the market, IHRA should be a welcome sight for fans of the sport
Gene's Quote → "Drag racing isn't really a drag if you green light IHRA for a starting position on your PC. Race, don't walk, to buy your copy post haste"

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER
Developer → 3D Realms
Publisher → GT Interactive
Release Date → "When it's done"
The Pitch → Once upon a time, there was a first-person shooter named *Duke Nukem 3D*. And it was good. A sequel, called *Duke Nukem Forever*, was quickly announced using the *Quake II* engine. A few paltry screenshots, a switch to the *Unreal* engine, and a couple of E3's later, *Duke Nukem Forever* is still in development, It's gonna be great, but we'd like to play it while we're still young enough to enjoy it. As it stands now, we might be playing *Daikatana 2* before getting a chance to "come get some" again
Gene's Quote → "*Duke Forever* is a forbidden force of fortune that I forecast to be the fortuitous foremost format forerunner for game of the millennium!"

SEA DOGS

Developer → Akella
Publisher → Bethesda Softworks
Release Date → August 2000
The Pitch → The closest comparison is *Doggerfall* on the high seas. This RPG/strategy amalgamation tells the tale of a young captain (you) who has the choice of pledging allegiance to one of three countries or becoming a swashbuckling pirate. An open-ended adventure, you can accept quests and missions to follow the main plot or sail the seven seas raiding ships (which sounds pretty good to us). A multiplayer melee ship combat mode will be in the final version.
Gene's Quote → "*Sea Dogs* will wow, not bow-wow, when it sails into stores this fall. This is one salty pup that won't be all wet"
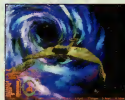
KLINGON ACADEMY

Developer → 14 Degrees East
Publisher → Interplay
Release Date → Q1 2000
The Pitch → A sequel of sorts to the *Wing Commander*-esque *Starfleet Academy*, *Klingon Academy* is set right before the events of *Star Trek VI* (the last movie to star the "old generation" cast). Christopher Plummer reprises his role as General Chang to teach a class of Klingon recruits the art of space combat and how FMV can extend your acting career. The graphics look better, but watching a cast of frustrated Shakespearean thespians chew up the scenery may be just a little too much to bear
Gene's Quote → "Even if you think Star Trek is Star Bleck, *Klingon Academy* gets high marks. All tribbles aside, be prepared to set your PC on fun!"

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Get a life with Gia DeCarlo
HOW TO WIN HER HEART — NOT OWN IT

Since the boys' insane ramblings about Malentine's Day will undoubtedly never take off, it's best you learn to deal with the most important holiday in any relationship. Whether it is a first date or the first year of a relationship, the gift and sentiments expressed (or not expressed) on Valentine's Day are likely to change your relationship forever. I've compiled some typical situations you might encounter and the appropriate (and inappropriate) gift for that special moment. If you're about to skip this information, thinking it doesn't matter, then it's likely you've never had a Valentine and if you don't heed my advice you probably never will — take it from someone who has received plenty of Valentine's gifts.

Gia doesn't know the Tiffany box contains a K-mart gift. But you didn't hear that from us.

THE FIRST DATE
Don't laugh — it *can* happen. If you are ever unfortunate enough to have your very first date on Valentine's Day then you must tread carefully — very carefully.

NOTHING SAYS I'M A PSYCHOTIC FREAK LIKE → An anal plug, crotchless panties, and two tickets to the 9:00 showing of *The Big Tits Project* at a sleazy theater
BEST CASE SCENARIO → She doesn't have you arrested or castrated on the spot
WORST CASE SCENARIO → She actually LOVES the ... uhh ... thought — now that's SCARY

NOTHING SAYS I'M A DESPERATE LOSER LIKE → Serenading her with wispy tales of love — all sung in your highest falsetto
BEST CASE SCENARIO → You're dating Jewel, she steals the lyrics and makes a poetry book, platinum selling album, and a series of Lifetime movies.
WORST CASE SCENARIO → Your friends happen to come by in the middle of the oh-so-touching chorus, "You complete me"

THE PERFECT GIFT → A perfect, single red rose
WHY IT WORKS → Romantic but not overbearing (however it really is pretty cheap)
POSSIBLE PITFALLS → She's violently allergic to roses and begins spewing her dinner on your lap

THE BLIND DATE → What does it matter — she can't see anyway

THE LIVIN' IN SIN GIRL
The live-in girlfriend is a dangerous beast, especially on Valentine's Day. The only step forward in this relationship is marriage (in her mind anyway) and all steps back involve the destruction of your property.

NOTHING SAYS KILL ME IN MY SLEEP LIKE → Something for the apartment, no matter how expensive, useful, or thoughtful it is. If it's not a diamond ring accompanied by a "Will you ..." then it just isn't good enough
BEST-CASE SCENARIO → Doesn't matter how much you spend, how creative your gift is, or how much you "really care" about her. Give up the rock or you'll get the "How thoughtful, you inconsiderate prick" treatment
WORST-CASE SCENARIO → She kills you in your sleep

NOTHING SAYS A PREMATURE "I DO" LIKE → A proposal and diamond ring — this can still be avoided

WHATTHEHELL?
Betcha Can't Eat Just One — But They'll Make Lots More

Every once in a while, we've just gotta point out how ridiculous game marketing has gotten. Exhibit A — "Lara Croft's Chocolate Adventure," 340 calories of candy bar adorned by the bikini-clad heroine. At least the chocolate isn't four years old ... we can't say the same for the game engine. If we HAD to get chocolate for Valentine's Day, though, this would be a helluva lot better than a cheap Whitman's sampler.

Of course, when we say "You already bought the cow," we meant that in the best way possible

STORM

Developer → Buka Entertainment/Media
Publisher → Bethesda Softworks
Release Date → Q4 2000
The Pitch → Another "popular game" meets "popular game" concept, Storm is supposed to combine the action and gameplay of *Wing Commander*, *MechWarrior 3*, and *Tribes*. As a member of an elite fighting force facing a revolution on a colonial outpost, you fight elaborate air battles using planes, helicopters, and gravity-defying futuristic hovercraft among the 50 available craft
Gene's Quote → "Batten down the hatches because a Storm is blowing in. But it's not a hurricane — it's a hurrah-icane!"

Gia likes to relax by lying next to a roaring fire, sipping on red wine. She also works while lying next to a roaring fire and sipping on red wine. Wait a sec ... we see a trend there ...

THE PERFECT GIFT → Something silver from Tiffany (as in the store, not Amber Theissen)
WHY IT WORKS → The blue box from Tiffany instantly wins her over and the silver is pretty cheap (compared to an engagement ring at least)
POSSIBLE PITFALLS → Giving her jewelry that isn't an engagement ring is kinda like teasing her — some girls don't react well to being teased

THE WIFE
Many of you may think that when you marry a woman, that Valentine's Day is a thing of the past — boy are you wrong.
NOTHING SAYS SHE'S GETTING HALF LIKE → New *Coming Ware* and the all-new Dirt Devil II Extreme
BEST CASE SCENARIO → Half of what you've got isn't much
WORST CASE SCENARIO → She uses Dirt Devil attachments on your extremities — not the kind of suction you're looking for

NOTHING SAYS "I'LL BE EXPECTING SOMETHING BETTER NEXT YEAR" LIKE → The Hope Diamond. Let's face it, once you've given your lifemate an extravagant gift, then a dozen roses will never work again
BEST CASE SCENARIO → Quick, clean divorce before things get out of hand
WORST CASE SCENARIO → You have to get less expensive gifts for your mistress, and they don't tolerate that (we hear)
THE PERFECT GIFT → Oh hell, what does it matter? You already bought the cow

BLITZ – DISC ARENA

Developer → SouthEnd Interactive
Publisher → TBA
Release Date → When it's done (and has a publisher)
The Pitch → The story is the standard nonsense about a future in which corporations have taken over the world, controlling an organized gambling ring involving massive staged fights (and that's the short version.) What you really want to know is that it has arena-based deathmatch-style play involving high-tech disc weapons. Unfortunately, disc weapons in most first person shooters (like *Unreal Tournament*) kinda suck ... but maybe *Blitz* will be different
Gene's Quote → "Move over, *Quake III* — there's a new Arena in town! *Blitz* is a real disc-overy that just can't be fumbled."

RUT-ROH!

Zoinks! Ed leaves PCXL to chase gh-gh-ghosts

Out of all the **PCXL** staffers, former Associate Editor Ed Lee most looks (dressed, acted, talked, etc.) like a cartoon character. Now he's getting his chance in the big leagues.

Joining the cast of "The All-New Scooby, Shaggy, And Ed Lee Mystery Hour" this season, Ed replaces Scrappy Doo who tragically committed suicide during a bout of autoerotic asphyxiation last year. "Dah-da-da-DAH, da-daaaah! Glock-Glock power!" chanted Ed. Replacing Ed in the role of Associate Editor will be Matt Holmes. Matt, you've got some pretty big pants to fill.

NOW PLAYING

HERE'S A QUICK LOOK AT TWO GAMES RELEASED RIGHT BEFORE WE WENT TO PRESS.

HYPE: THE TIME QUEST

Developer → Playmobil Interactive
Publisher → UbiSoft
Release Date → Out now
The Pitch → The Legend of Zelda for the PC (as the game box reminds you several times) is a kids' game that desperately wants to be taken seriously by adults. And for a sub-$30 price tag, it's really just that for PC owners who'd like a return trip to simpler times. Best part: Creatures don't die — they just get "knocked out"
Gene's Quote → "The hype on Hype is no hype — it's a hip-hop to happy-land courtesy of Playmobil. The only quest-ion you'll have is: 'When can I play?'"
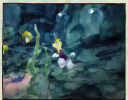
RAYMAN 2

Developer → UbiSoft
Publisher → UbiSoft
Release Date → Out now
The Pitch → The little whatever-it-is returns in this 3D hop-n-bop adventure game. The story is about space pirates invading Rayman's world, but we know it's really about exploring and collecting special powers. If this is your thing (and you know who you are) then you won't be disappointed. But if you're not a big Rayman fan there probably isn't much here that will change your mind
Gene's Quote → "Rayman 2 has twice the action, twice the story, and twice the fun! It's a ray of sunshine that is 2 good to miss"

ASS MARKETING

How do bad games get created? Blame it on the "mass market" — softcore gamers tempted by snazzy box art and come-hither cover lines. Be careful when responding to questionnaires like this one.

Congratulations on purchasing Simon Sez 3D! Wow, you must be like a member of Mensa or something to be smart enough to buy this game. And handsome, too! Say, have you lost weight?

We value the opinions of brainiacs like you, so please take a few very brief moments to answer the following questions. As an incentive, we'll send you the version 1.1 patch you'll need to get past the load screen. (Allow two hours for completion)

FIRST (your real name) ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **MI** (If purchasing a hunting game, put ". Bob") ☐ **LAST** ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

STREET ADDRESS (or militia compound) ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **CITY** ☐☐☐☐☐☐ **STATE** ☐☐ **ZIP CODE** ☐☐☐☐☐

TELEPHONE (no funny stuff, we'll be checking) ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **SPAM E-MAIL ADDRESS** ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

DISTANCE FROM NEAREST WAL-MART (in miles) _____

1. Sex of purchaser?
☐ Male   ☐ Mother

2. Age
☐ Birth-17   ☐ 18-35   ☐ 36-Dead

3. Was Simon Sez 3D...
☐ An unpleasant surprise
☐ An impulse purchase
☐ Revenge

4. Which factor most influenced the decision to purchase Simon Sez 3D?
☐ Recipient once tried demo on a whim
☐ Price was a miraculous one-penny less than 20 bucks
☐ Chance to nostalgically relive a bright moment from an otherwise bleak childhood
☐ Juxtaposition of "3D" and hip bastardization of "says"
☐ Parents shopping without supervision
☐ Never-before-seen man recommended it
☐ Insanity
☐ I like shiny objects

5. Have you played the game yet?
☐ Unfortunately
☐ Still playing with box
☐ No, you haven't sent the patch yet, remember?

6. How do you rate Simon Sez 3D?
☐ Better than eating broken glass
☐ As good as eating broken glass
☐ Not as good as eating broken glass

7. Who will play game most often?
☐ Adult (If adult, circle malady — autism, retardation, Alzheimer's, the thing that guy from "Shine" had)
☐ "Special" Teen 13-17
☐ Children up to 12
☐ Family Pet
☐ Company PR representative at product demos

8. Would you recommend Simon Sez 3D to a friend?
☐ Yes, they can have my copy
☐ Are you kidding?
☐ Not a chance
☐ Seriously — you're kidding, right?

9. Please indicate your three favorite CD-ROM games.
☐ Myst/Riven
☐ _____ Extreme
☐ _____ !
☐ _____ 3D

10. What video game systems do you own?
☐ Gameboy
☐ Gameboy Pocket
☐ Gameboy Color
☐ Gameboy Color Pokémon Special Edition
☐ Other

11. What is your favorite type of game?
☐ Tomb Raider-derivative
☐ Quake-derivative
☐ SimCity-derivative
☐ Xtreme Sports
☐ Old kids games updated into a rich 3D environment
(If not this answer, skip to question 13)

12. Which game from your past would you like to see in a rich 3D environment?
☐ Hangman
☐ Tic-Tac-Toe
☐ Pong (N/A)
☐ Doctor
☐ Pull My Finger
☐ X-Y-Z
☐ What Is That Strange Man Doing To Mommy?
☐ Dodging Bullets
☐ Why Doesn't Daddy Love Us Anymore?

13. In 50 words or less explain how not buying mass-market games at a low price point is un-American.

FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE FOR DEMOGRAPHIC USE ONLY

14. What is the highest level of education completed?
☐ Kindergarten
☐ Grade School
☐ High School
☐ The Streets
☐ Boot Camp
☐ Some College
☐ MIT Tech

15. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
☐ Full-Time
☐ Part-Time
☐ Student
☐ Lottery Ticket Holder
☐ Selling Organs On E-Bay

16. What is your annual family income?
☐ $14.99
☐ $19.99
☐ $3.99/minute
☐ Under $20,000
☐ $20,000 - $40,000
☐ $40,000 or more (please check to make sure address information is correct)

17. Check the box below if you do not want to be contacted with information on future games, special offers, or new products that might be of interest to you.
☐   (By checking here, you authorize us to contact you for the purpose of verifying that you did indeed check this box.)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.
(OOPS, WE DIDN'T SAY "SIMON SEZ")

MalentinesDay **Card** (fold and send)

Want Something Sweet?

Celebrate Malentine's Day January 30th

MALEMARK
just say it!™

LEAVE SEAT UP

GET ME A BEER

SCORE!

JUST LEGAL

DOUBLE D'S

BACON

DO ME!

TOUCHDOWN

Here's Candi.

Happy Malentine's Day!

letters@pcxl.com

FEEDBACK

⟶ Each month we get a server full of e-mail from readers, their parents and/or wives, and one or two from an attorney. They all fall under two categories: Love or hate. It's okay though. We figure if someone didn't hate us, then no one could love us (at least that's what we say before we cry ourselves to sleep). The common thread linking every piece of mail: You people are frickin weird! For your amusement please observe the weirdness that is our readership ...

GIA GOT BACK?

PCXL,
Gia DeCarlo's face is all hot and everything, but we've never seen below her waist. Does she suffer from tank-ass or what? I'm sure I'm not the only one who has contemplated the size and shape of her bottom.

Ass Man

Gia was so offended by your letter that she ran to the bathroom and cried for an hour. Luckily we were able to sneak this picture of her backside as she was crying.

What do you think of Gia's backside? Send responses to giasbuttpoll@pcxl.com.

MARITAL BL-ASS

Last night, I was enjoying the latest issue of your mag in bed and came across a little blurb on *Return to Krondor*. It stated simply. "Return to Assdor: The Assening." For some reason, maybe because it was 3:00 AM, I thought this was the most hilarious thing I'd read since *Hitchhiker's Guide*. Unfortunately my wife was peacefully (until then at least) sleeping next to me. I woke her up 'cause I was laughing so damn hard and

for some reason, I couldn't stop laughing. The more I tried to stop, the harder I laughed. Goddamn she got pissed! Needless to say I got kicked out and had to sleep on the couch, laughing all the time, which just made things worse. I finally giggled myself to sleep and woke up with a really sore back. I hate that couch.

A Reader

Dear Reader,
That's not the way *we* usually wake up your wife.

GOTH GIRL MANIA

Well guys I'd like to make a brief statement, "Your Mag Rocks Nads." My wife doesn't share that sentiment — she considers your magazine totally offensive and has threatened me with divorce if one of our children gets ahold of it from my room. Keep up the great job, and maybe e-mail me some more pics of gothgirl

A Reader

P.S. My wife destroyed the Babes CD that was with the Nov. issue. Is there any way to get another?

Dear Reader,
Instead of another babe CD, how about another wife?

PCXL,
Who is this "gothgirl" on p.137 in the Nov. edition? She's been running around my head since this morning. I was just flipping the pages while chewing down the last piece of loaf, when I suddenly realized the most beautiful girl was sitting in front of me. Now I can't stop thinking about her. I'm doing a bad job at work, a customer even had to ask me a question twice. Please print more

pictures in the December edition if you have any. If not, write her and ask if she can send some. If you can't, won't, or if you're dreamy or tired, no problem.

Obsessed

Dear Obsessed,
We're dreamy and tired, but what the hell ...

So it's not the November goth girl ... We thought Rose McGowan was close enough.

THEY'RE ON TO US

Dear Sirs:
I find your new magazine that you dumped on my young daughter totally without merit. It is vulgar, obscene, and I am in contact with a lawyer. Please withdraw this magazine subscription from her.

**Thank you,
Concerned Father**

Dear Concerned Father,
Despite our constant efforts to dump magazines on impressionable young girls, it just isn't working. However, we do agree that being in contact with a lawyer is both vulgar and obscene.

THE PEOPLE VS. PCXL

Please forward this to your circulation department. Effective immediately, remove my name and address from your

mailing/subscription list. My 13-year-old son requested me to use my credit card to subscribe to this magazine. Your ads said nothing about the sexual content of your porn, to wit:

We have removed your name (after writing it on every bathroom wall we could find) and will plead to each of the charges you have made about our wits.

... A girlie calendar

Innocent: The ladies on our calendar were quite clearly women, not girlies, sir.

... A hooker look-a-like on your cover

Guilty as charged: But she was a friendly hooker, doesn't that help?

... Your Title "Sex, Games, Rock n' Roll"; why don't you also add, "AIDS, Venereal Disease, Divorce, Unwanted pregnancy, Abortions, and Women Are Sex Gratification Objects For Men"?

Innocent on five counts: While we agree that unwanted pregnancies and venereal diseases do lead to divorce, we really don't see what the hell it has to do with us.
Guilty on one count: Women are sex gratification objects for men, but only if they know how to shake it — if you know what we mean. On another note, that's a great idea on the tag line. We'll see if we can make it fit.

... Over 1GB of Hot Babes

Innocent: That was a little miscalculation by a bunch of idiots who just don't get the metric system. The correct number was actually closer to 100MB, and some of them aren't really all that hot.

... Games That Will Get You Laid

Innocent: From our research we are very sad to say that they *don't.* But wait, there's more ...

... I am a Dad that is trying to keep his 13-year-old son clean of drugs, AIDS, VD, unwanted pregnancy, and to teach him respect for the woman he will one day marry. I will not pay anything on my credit card for this subscription. If I receive any further pornography from you, I will write the Attorney General, State of Illinois, and issue a formal complaint. I have already contacted my attorneys as to further steps that may be taken. Forward this communication to the appropriate department. I am sending this communication with a return receipt request so as to have proof that you were notified.

Consider us notified, Dad. We took the liberty to buy you some credit card to buy you some REAL pornography, which you should be getting in the mail from us any day now.

IRRELEVANT REVIEW?

Tell Ed I give his review of *Revenant* a score of 6 and we'll call it even.

Rex Dickson
Lead Designer/Producer
Cinematix Studios

For the record, we internally scored most of Ed's reviews as 4's — but we're tough graders.

CHICKS DIG US!

Believe it or not I'm a 30-something-year-old woman who actually enjoys your magazine. Maybe it's because I feel sorry for you because you happen to be geeks (except for Gia, at least she's cool) or maybe it's your charming sense of humor (yeah right). Whatever the reason (the doctor told me I just needed some rest), it's about time you put in a few pics for the ladies in addition to the half nakid pics of women you have for the guys. How about Matthew Mcconehey (or however you spell it). So he likes playing the bongos naked — since when is that a bad thing?

Sincerely,
T. "I Can't Believe I Actually Read This Magazine" Dunckel

Dear T.,

First off, we aren't geeks. We just play them in this magazine. Secondly, what do you mean there is no beefcake? Turn to the staff page and you'll see over 1,000 pounds of pure man. As for your request for non-**PCXL** beefcake, see below for an old pic from *Texas Chainsaw Masscre*.
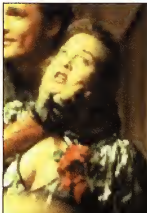
Matthew McSomethin and Renee Zelwhatever ... everyone happy?

BABE-FREE PCXL

Look gang, I love **PCXL**. Really. I rarely laugh out loud at magazines (*MAD* and *CRACKED* haven't done "it" for me in years). Your reviews hit the bullseye more often than not, and your views of the world in general mesh with mine. A finer Reader/Magazine coalition can not be found. But I have a problem. My fiancee thinks I get **PCXL** simply to look at and oogle all the babes found front to back, in every nook and cranny throughout **PCXL**. But I don't. Really. No. Really. Anyway, any chance you can publish a "babeacatied" or "babe-free" version of **PCXL**? I'm whipped. Help me. Thanks.

Frumpy Jones

Is it just us or does anyone else find some humor in the fact that someone named "Frumpy" wants us to get rid of the babes?

DOING THE RIGHT THING

I am a store manager for the local Software ETC. We serve

most of Southwestern Montana, admittedly it's not downtown New York here. In short, I find your magazine to be clearly one of the best magazines I have read in a long time. I have placed your magazine in a clear area where all of the customers can see it. We are commonly selling it out. And if there is anything I can do to continue to support your magazine, let me know.

Greg

Many thanks, Greg. Now if other readers would take a hint from you, then maybe we'd actually sell some copies outside of the semi-great state of Montana. Readers with connections are wanted, so send tales to letters@pcxl.com of how you made **PCXL** fly off the shelves and we'll hook you up in some really crappy games or some leftover PR junk.

Dear Mike (and assorted peons),
[OBLIGATORY BUTT KISSING ALERT]

First off let me say that your magazine rules! You guys are to journalism what *Animal House* was to film. As someone who reads a lot of computer magazines, yours stands out from the crowd in a big way. On to the point! We sell out of **PCXL** before I get a chance to snag one! As a low-paid cog in the retail machine, I can ill-afford to actually purchase magazines, so in the interest of keeping informed, I snag the old issues when the new ones come in. But since we always sell out of **PCXL** I have to get my news from all those cookie-cutter, look-alike, dreary mags. I'm writing to you to score a freebie subscription for me and the guys at the store.

A Reader

Dear Reader,
[OBLIGATORY LYING ALERT]
No problem. I, Mike, personally had peons put together a package of **PCXL**'s for you and the guys. You helped us, now my ASS-orted peons will help you. Or pee on you. Whatever.

Gaming 411

Follow these three easy steps to get all the product information you desire!

1 Go to: http://www.pcxl.com/gaming411

2 Select the product category from a complete list. Search by name, or select the vendor's number from the list below for up-to-date info on your favorite games.

3 Follow the format to receive all the info you desire. You will also be able to access the vendor's websites from Gaming 411.

These sponsors make it possible for **PC ACCELERATOR** to exist. Without them we'd just be a bunch of loud-mouthed fools. We appreciate their advertising, but if they make a game that sucks, we WILL kill it. Nobody owns **PCXL**, but **PCXL**.

ADVERTISER INDEX

Imagine Media, Inc. is not responsible for typographical errors found in the Advertiser Index and/or The Gaming 411 web page.

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PC ACCELERATOR February 2000

Fake Ad Contest Hint —→ The Fake ad is NOT listed on this page. Doh!

Id: New dog, same ol' tricks

Well folks, it's done and it's released. It's got a revamped engine, better AI, and new models. It's almost exactly the same as its predecessors, but true fans will buy it anyway since they only want a new coat of paint on an ancient game. But wait! Am I talking about *Tomb Raider IV* or *Quake 3 Arena*? Does it matter?

Id has finally managed to free itself of that annoying creativity thing and polish their Deathmatch pony until it freakin' glows in the dark. They coined the term and what they put on the *Q3A* CD is just that: Deathmatch. There is no single-player component, merely a series of training missions where you practice your aiming skills against bots that don't act remotely human. You must play online — where the rocket launcher is king and stopping to admire the scenery gives your opponent an easy frag. Isn't there more to the genre than running, jumping, and shooting?

How about: Laser trip-mines? *Duke Nukem* gave birth to them, *Half-Life* made 'em pretty. How 'bout Alt-Fire modes? They were in *Blood*, and *Unreal Tournament* makes good use of them, too. What happened to alternate gametypes? Domination, Assault, Gas Chamber, Save the President! And vehicles! I'll say it again — vehicles! Environmental effects where you fight in thick fog or in darkness with flashlights. Where are the smoke grenades? There have been so many innovations in Deathmatch that when I look at *Q3A*, it's hard for me to compliment its unparalleled success in ignoring them. Don't we mature gamers (if there is such an animal) expect more?

Now, I'll admit that *Q3A* is a remarkable technology demo. It's got smooth graphics (once you get it working), A3D sound support (guess Creative Labs is small potatoes to Id), and smooth network support (if you have a cable modem). No one can look at Paul Steed's amazing models and Kenneth Scott's texture wizardry and not sigh with awe. Some of the level design is architectural genius. It's a screenshot lover's nocturnal emission. But when you're in the heat of the game, it's just a colored blur like every other deathmatch game — *Quake 1* and *2* included. It's that blur that makes 10 minutes of *Q3A* the same as 10 hours of *Q3A*: Somewhat exciting yet utterly forgettable. *Q3A* does very, very little pretty damn well, and for those who don't know any better, that's enough. Hell, millions play minesweeper and solitaire. They even play *Tomb Raider*.

— MATT "I'M NEW SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT" HOLMES

Here's a screen from *Quake*, or is it *Quake II*? I mean *Quake III*. Oh whatever.

SECOND PERSON

Ignorant slutishness to the most ignorant and slutish degree! *Q3A* sets out to be Deathmatch King, and that's exactly what it does. To suggest that the single-player mode is useless is evidence of not having played it at its higher difficulty settings through all those levels of perfect DM-ing design. Sure, it's training for online, but the tactics and incredibly individual styles of the characters perfectly recreates online battles for those with a shitty connection. It's about pitting your moves against someone else's moves; it's about knowing how to control levels using the different weapons; it's about playing CTF on perfectly balanced maps (not having a good idea like Assault fail on pathetically crappy level designs — Operation Overlord excepted); it's all about fast-paced deathmatching.

Those additions that you want are likely to come from user mods, but it was never Id's plan to rewrite the action rule book. Just author its final rendition, and in *Q3A* they've pulled that off perfectly. Your ignorance and sluticity knows no bounds.

— ROB "GOT HIS SHIT TOGETHER" SMITH

YOU BOUGHT 'EM, NOW BEAT 'EM
The best and brightest from the holiday season have been put through hours of testing. The result: The best damn tips and strategies you'll find anywhere. How to get the girl, win the game, and get the job — or even lose the game, girl, and job. Use it how you like — we give you the power.

THE 25 WORST INJURIES IN GAMES

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THE END OF GAMES!

HOT FOR THE TEACHER
PROF. FULLCREEK AND ANTI-ALL STAR CAST GIVE AT THEIR SECRETS TO GAMING GLORY

IT ALL COMES TO AN END
Ever wondered what the final boss in *Doom II* looked like? Want to know the final twist in *Gabriel Knight*? What's the worst ending? We take a look at the final reward in games: The end.

THE 25 WORST INJURIES IN GAMES
You remember the Joe Theismann broken leg? Well gaming has had its share of violence, and we show you the injuries that made rollerball look like a sissy sport.

MUCH, MUCH MORE
If that was all we were doing next month then we'd have time to update our website. Instead, we'll keep stuffing the issue full of babes and the usual absurdity you've come to love and respect.

HOW MUCH SPEED DOES MY PC NEED?
MORE THAN MY FRIEND BOB'S.

Congratulations. You just left Bob and his computer back there about half a mile, standing in a cloud of your dust. Meanwhile you're cruising at Mach II thanks to the new motherboard. Combined with RDRAM, it offers up to a 116% increased memory performance gain over earlier systems.* The result — WHOA! Start it up and you'll find that everything is faster, smoother, more realistic and more intense. Technology at warp speed. It's one more benefit of the Dell4me℠ total ownership experience. It's a complete resource for products and services that make it easy for you to get the most out of technology.

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